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## Recycled rhetoric: brand Israel "pinkwashing" in historical context

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**RECYCLED RHETORIC:  
BRAND ISRAEL “PINKWASHING” IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

**A Thesis**

**Presented in**

**Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of**

**Master of Arts**

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**BY**

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## Chapter One

### Introduction: “Pinkwashing” Israeli Settler-Colonialism

*“It’s not about gay rights...Pinkwashing aims to disparage Israel’s neighbors in order to justify the country’s existence as necessary by any means, relying on the image of a lone democracy barely surviving surrounded by violent, intolerant, women-hating, and backward societies.”*

- *Palestinian Queers for BDS, Al-Qaws, and Pinkwatching Israel* (Pinkwatching Israel, “Pinkwatching Kit”)

### Setting the Stage: A Night at the Movies

On October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012, just after 6:30 pm, the lights dimmed in the Hoover Leppen Theatre of the Center on Halsted, Chicago’s largest LGBT community center (Center on Halsted). On the screen, credits began to roll for Israeli director Doron Eran’s new film “Melting Away.”

Audience members watched an uplifting and emotional story about parents learning to accept their transgender child. When this film faded out, another began. This time the film was “Yossi” by Israeli-American director Eytan Fox. Audience members watched a young nurse open the door of a hospital room and wake up Yossi, the titular character. For the next 83 minutes, the story of this young gay man unfolds: When the movie begins Yossi is devastated by the death of his lover Jagger, a fellow Israeli soldier who was killed in Lebanon ten years previously. Slowly, he finds healing and romance when he meets a group of young Israeli soldiers who show him that Israeli society is more accepting of gay people like them than ever before (Taylor). Attendees of this film screening came for what the Center on Halsted called “An evening of new LGBTQ films.” Audience members may or may not have known – or cared - that Israeli governmental institutions had sponsored this screening.

The screenings of “Melting Away” and “Yossi” at the Center on Halsted were a part of the annual “Chicago Festival of Israeli Cinema” and was sponsored by the Consulate General of Israel to the Midwest, the Israeli ministry of Tourism, the Jewish Federation/Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago, Friends of the Israeli Defense Forces, Israel Bonds, and the American Israel Public Action Committee (AIPAC) (“Sponsors And Hosts”). When Chicago’s largest LGBT paper *The Windy City Times* asked Tico Valle, the CEO of the Center on Halsted, why the Center participated in the film festival, he answered, “We do hope the screening will help to lead to more conversations about how we can work together to both celebrate LGBTQ culture and fight oppression of all kinds” (Sosin).

But while audience members watched these films, a group of protesters, including myself, marched through the rain in front of the Center on Halsted. Together, we argued that these films were not harmless cultural expressions, but being used by the Israeli government to further a political agenda (Tompkins). In a letter to the Center on Halsted, we wrote:

Israeli government-sponsored cultural programs are part of a larger campaign to divert attention away from Israel's crimes against the Palestinian people – including, of course, LGBTQ-identified Palestinians....This branding campaign uses queers to paint Israel as "gay-friendly," and disavows Israel's human rights record in occupied Palestine...By partnering with the Israeli Consulate to screen these films, we feel that Center on Halsted is not merely engaging in harmless cross-cultural activity, but rather taking an active role in pinkwashing Israel's military occupation of Palestine. Events like this screening silence the voices and experiences of LGBTQ Palestinians and make the Center a less accepting place for all people affected by Israel's discriminatory policies, and all those who oppose war and racism (Southorn 1)

Protesters wore pink and black and energetically chanted slogans like “Stand Against Queer Exploitation/We won’t Hide the Occupation” and “Hey, Center, they can’t hide/Don’t pinkwash Israeli lies.” The demonstration was impossible to miss, but likely few passersby realized that these protesters were a part of a growing queer movement against the Israeli occupation of

Palestine.

From Ramallah, Palestine to Chicago, USA, queer movements against the Israeli apartheid system and military occupation of Palestine are growing. Outraged by what they see as Israel's colonial history and current apartheid policies, queer activists have begun to organize against Israel's violations of Palestinian human rights. Since the early 2000s, queer anti-occupation organizations have proliferated around the world. These organizations have challenged the Israeli occupation of Palestine through education campaigns and by demonstrating against LGBT organizations complicit with Israeli human rights violations. Queer organizations have been at the forefront of exposing and challenging a Israeli government sponsored public relations campaign named Brand Israel.

Brand Israel advertizing campaigns portray Israel as a safe-haven for gays and lesbians and Palestine as a regressive, violent and homophobic place as a way of justifying the Israeli occupation and colonial domination of Palestine. Activists have used the term "pinkwashing" to describe this rhetorical strategy. They argue that Brand Israel aims to deflect attention from Israel's military occupation and colonial domination of Palestine. Members of the organization Palestinian Queers for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions write that Brand Israel rhetoric aims to draw world scrutiny away from the following Israeli actions:

For [65] years, the Israeli occupation and expanding apartheid system has denied the Palestinian people their basic human rights. Palestinians in the West Bank have been living under a brutal military occupation manifested by illegal Israeli colonies, checkpoints, and a system of walls, barriers and roads accessible solely to Israeli settlers. Palestinians living inside Israel are continuously facing discriminatory policies. There are currently over 25 laws which specifically target them as non-Jewish and reduce them to second class citizens of Israel. Palestinians in the Diaspora and in UN administered refugee camps are by default denied their UN-sanctioned right to return to their lands. Finally, over 1.8 million Palestinian in the Gaza Strip are living in an open air prison under an illegal siege,

described by many prominent international experts as “slow genocide.” Israeli oppression, racism, and discrimination does not distinguish between Queer Palestinians and Heterosexual Palestinians (Palestinian Queers for BDS, “An Open Letter to Queer Academics, Artists, and Activists”).

Pinkwashing is a term used to criticize the Israeli public relations agenda. As a term, pinkwashing is a clever way to capture the idea that the Israeli government is using LGBT rights to cover up its human rights violations of Palestinians. Writer and Activist Sarah Schulman documents the development of the term pinkwashing in “A Documentary Guide to Pinkwashing.” She notes that “pinkwashing was coined by Breast Cancer Action in 1985 to describe companies who claim to support women with breast cancer while also profiting from their illness (Schulman). Schulman cites Palestine activist Dunya Alwan who attributes the use of the term in the Palestinian context to Ali Abunimah, editor of Electronic Intifada. At a meeting in 2010, Abunimah said, “We won’t put up with Israeli Whitewashing, Greenwashing, or Pinkwashing” (Schulman). Abunimah plays with the association of the color pink with the gay rights struggle, an association that dates to the Nazi use of the pink triangle to label gay prisoners in concentration camps. In order to avoid confusion, I use the term “Brand Israel rhetoric” to describe Israeli government sponsored public relations efforts that describe Israel as gay-friendly and Palestine and the rest of the Middle East as regressive and repressive. I use the term “anti-pinkwashing movements” to refer to queer/LGBT mobilizations against Brand Israel and Israeli settler-colonialism in Palestine.

Developing an activist response to Brand Israel rhetoric is not easy. As a member of the group that organized the protest outside of screening of “Melting Away” and “Yossi” at the Center on Halsted, I sat in meetings in which we struggled to articulate our message in the best way possible. Anti-pinkwashing movements are wrestling with some of the most important issues faced by queer and LGBT activists. Anti-pinkwashing activism raises questions about the nature



of queer liberation and the significance of civil LGBT rights gains. As a transnational movement against Israeli settler-colonialism, anti-pinkwashing activism also raises questions about the relationship of queer movements to anti-racist and anti-colonial struggles, as well as questions about how queer people in different national contexts can build transnational alliances.

As a queer anti-pinkwashing activist myself, this research topic has very personal implications for me. I have been involved in Palestinian solidarity activism since 2004 when I first traveled to the West Bank. In 2006, I was studying Arabic in Bethlehem during the Jerusalem WorldPride celebrations. I wrote about the then burgeoning queer boycott campaign for my hometown LGBT paper (Ellison). In 2007, I began working in the West Bank in a small, rural village called At-Tuwani. I worked to support the village's nonviolent resistance movement and to support the At-Tuwani Women's Cooperative. When I returned to the United States in 2010, I became involved in the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement, including anti-pinkwashing organizing. I have observed many instances of Brand Israel campaigns designed to appeal to a queer person like me here in the city of Chicago and experienced the challenge of organizing around this issue.

## **Thesis**

In this thesis, I explore the intersections between gender, race, sexuality and settler-colonialism and their implications for anti-pinkwashing activism. I endeavor to demonstrate that the persuasive power of Brand Israel relies on racist discourses about Arabs and Muslims that reflect the rhetoric of the Zionist kibbutz movement and larger colonial discourses, especially orientalist discourses about Arab/Muslim women. To draw out this discourse, I examine materials from two prominent Israel advocacy groups that use Brand Israel techniques: Stand With Us and Blue

Star. By placing Brand Israel rhetoric in a historical context, I complicate the analysis of scholars and activists who have characterized the use of gay rights to justify military intervention and settler colonialism as new. Brand Israel materials themselves reveal that this discourse relies on orientalist discourses about Arab women and queer criminal archetypes that have held persuasive power for hundreds of years. I draw on the work of transgender and Arab feminist scholars and activists who have discussed how gender and race categories have been produced by colonial processes and have developed resistance strategies based at the intersection between gender, sexuality, and race. To resist Brand Israel campaigns effectively, activists need to understand how Brand Israel rhetoric is racist. In order to do so, activists must understand how these discourses arise from historical colonial discourses.

## **Introduction to Brand Israel**

The rhetoric that activists call pinkwashing is a branding strategy called Brand Israel, which was developed by private public relations firms at the behest of the Israeli government. In her description of Brand Israel, Sarah Schulman cites Palestinian Queers for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions, Al-Qaws (Arabic for “rainbow”), and Pinkwatching Israel, three prominent Arab queer/LGBT<sup>1</sup> organizations, who define Brand Israel rhetoric as “the cynical use of gay rights

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<sup>1</sup> Finding English language terms that appropriately describe Palestinian and other Arab queer and LGBT communities is difficult. Whenever possible, I use the terms used by the organizations themselves. When that is not possible, I use the term queer/LGBT because I feel this communicates the broadest conception of a community oppressed on the basis of gender and sexuality, while making as few specific identity claims as possible. In turn, I use the term LGBT or gay and lesbian to refer to organizations who do not understand themselves as queer and do not practice queer politics.

I use this language in response to a request made by Palestinian queer/LGBT organization Al Qaws. On its website, Al Qaws has published writing guidelines for journalists. I summarize them here because I believe that they help to explain the situated identities I am trying to respect.

“Wait a second,” writes Al Qaws, “before you write, though you are so passionate to write about us...We think it would be helpful for you and our cause, to take a few minutes, have a cup of coffee, and read before you write” (Al Qaws). Al Qaws goes on to explain that because 700,000 Palestinians were violently expelled from their homes when Israel established itself in 1948, Palestinian refugees now live all over the world in very different circumstances (Institute for Middle East Understanding). Furthermore, Al Qaws explains, within Israel and the Palestinian Territories, Palestinians have very different rights and economic opportunities depending on their national status:

Although the 1.25 million Palestinian citizens of Israel regularly face well-documented denials of civil and human rights, because they are Israeli citizens, they have access to certain legal rights that are not available to West Bank and Gaza Strip

and queer voices to obscure Israeli human rights violations. Brand Israel portrays Israel as a haven for gays in the Middle East, while demonizing surrounding countries and societies” (Palestinian Queers for BDS, Al-Qaws, and Pinkwatching Israel).

Sarah Schulman has described in detail the development of Brand Israel advertising techniques. She cites the Jewish Forward newspaper, which reported that in 2005 the Israeli Foreign Ministry, the Prime Minister's Office and the Finance Ministry launched Brand Israel after three years of consultation with American marketing executives. The Brand Israel campaign aimed to a "re-brand" the country's image to appear "relevant and modern" (Schulman).

Brand Israel was developed as a partnership between private American firms and the Israeli government. In 2001, Ido Aharoni, who held the position of consul for media and public relations at the New York Consulate General of Israel, argued that traditional Israeli public relations efforts were inadequate. He developed a partnership with private public relations and advertising firms to research US American attitudes towards Israel and develop marketing techniques to change them (William Davidson Institute and Yaffe Center for Persuasive Communications 10).

Research conducted by the Brand Israel Group showed that Americans thought that Israel was irrelevant to their lives (Rosenblatt). The Brand Israel Group convinced the Israeli Foreign

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Palestinians, who are not Israeli citizens (or citizens of any country) and, among other things, cannot legally live, study, or work in Israel. To further complicate the matter, Jerusalem Palestinians are considered “permanent residents” of Israel, an intermediate status between “citizen” and “non-citizen” that entitles them to certain rights but not the full set of rights guaranteed to citizens. These differences have enormous consequences for LGBTQ Palestinians, who, depending on their legal status, live under different sets of laws and have available to them different sets of rights (including, for example, the right to travel to or live in a different place) (Al Qaws).

Al Qaws finishes by entreating journalists to understand the common struggle of Palestinian queer/LGBT people without minimizing the differences between them. They also note that while some Palestinians identify as gay, lesbian, trans and/or queer, others do not. “We urge journalists who are interested in representing our stories and experiences to the world to not impose some pre-determined standard, but to consider our own, equally valid ideas about “freedom” and “liberation” and what it means to be a LGBTQ person” (Al Qaws).

Ministry to begin targeting 18-34 year old men. In 2007, Aharoni was appointed by Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni to head Israel's first brand management office. Livni gave Aharoni a 4 million dollar budget. This represented a significant increase to Israel's already existing public relations and marketing budget of 13 million dollars (Schulman).

Under Aharoni, Israel's marketing campaign started with projects aimed at showing Israel to be fun and liberal. Developing ads about Israel's gay rights record proved to be a productive way to do so. In 2009, the Israeli government's Brand Israel campaign began to develop marketing campaigns both about and targeting LGBT communities. That year, the Israeli Foreign Ministry told Israeli newspaper Ynet that they would be sponsoring a Gay Olympics delegation "to help show to the world Israel's liberal and diverse face" (Schulman). In addition, a prominent private Zionist advocacy organization called Stand With Us told the Jerusalem Post that they were undertaking a campaign "to improve Israel's image through the gay community in Israel" (Schulman).

### **Brand Israel Rhetoric about Gay Rights**

Since 2009, Brand Israel campaigns have continued unabated. The Israeli government and private Zionist organizations have sponsored Brand Israel events and advertising campaigns ranging from film festivals and parade floats to brochures about Israel's gay rights record, sponsored trips to Tel Aviv, and outreach to college campus organizations. These campaigns accomplish the marketing goals of the Brand Israel strategy by making three primary interlocking arguments:

1. Brand Israel promotes "gay tourism" to Israel. The Israeli Ministry of Tourism has

targeted queer and LGBT communities in its advertising campaigns and through articles and promotions in travel industry materials. Zionist organizations have organized trips to Israel catering to LGBT people, especially LGBT Jews. These Brand Israel advertisements often tout gay pride celebrations as evidence of the liberation of Israeli gay people. They also assure LGBT travelers that they can be “out” and open about their sexuality while traveling in Israel (Bezalel). This rhetoric draws on discourses that treat the ability of individuals to be visible as LGBT subjects as one of the most important signs of sexual and gender liberation. By turn, this discourse casts non-Western societies in which LGBT/queer people are less visible as pre-modern, repressive, and homophobic (Ferguson 63). For examples of these ads, see figures 1 and 2.

2. Brand Israel celebrates Israel’s gay rights record. Most Brand Israel ads laud Israel for affording civil rights to gay and lesbian citizens. The framing of gay rights in these materials reflects a homonationalist narrative, accepting some queer and LGBT people as worthy of entry into the body politic, while excluding others. Brand Israel ads use a definition of “gay rights” that excludes a great many queer and LGBT people. Specific rights and protections for transgender people are largely unrealized in Israel and usually left out of Brand Israel campaigns (Puar, “The Golden Handcuffs of Gay Rights: How Pinkwashing Distorts Both LGBTIQ and Anti-Occupation Activism”). Most Brand Israel material focuses on the right of gay people to marry and participate openly in the Israeli military. Israeli gay rights activists point out that neither of these rights are fully realized, particularly the right to marry. In Israel, marriage is regulated by religion, sexuality, and race. The Israeli government defines marriage as a religious ceremony between a man and a

woman of the same racial /national category. Thus same-sex marriages are not performed inside Israel, but same-sex marriages performed overseas are recognized by the Israeli government. However, marriages between Israelis and Palestinians are not recognized. In addition, under Israel's identification card and citizenship system, many marriages between Palestinians are not fully recognized. Marriages between Palestinians with different classes of ID cards or passports, such as a Palestinian with a Jerusalem ID card and a Palestinian with ID from the West Bank, are not eligible for family unification (Puar, "The Golden Handcuffs of Gay Rights: How Pinkwashing Distorts Both LGBTIQ and Anti-Occupation Activism"). This means that if circumstances arise that cause family members to be separated by checkpoints or borders, married couples have no access to legal remedy and will remain apart. This complex regulating of marriage rights is not addressed in Brand Israel discourses. Instead, these discourses celebrate "gay rights" that are not equally available to all people living under Israeli jurisdiction. See figures 4 and 5 for examples of this discourse.

3. Brand Israel makes comparisons between Israel, Palestine, and the rest of the Middle East, arguing that Arab and Muslim nations do not afford the same level of safety and legal rights as Israel offers its gay citizens. Brand Israel uses discourses that imply Israeli exceptionalism, describing Israel as the only democracy in the Middle East and as culturally similar to the United States and Western Europe. Through these arguments, Brand Israel materials establish Israel as progressive and enlightened and Arab and Muslim cultures as regressive and backward. See figures 5 and 6 for examples of these ads.

# Celebrate Pride in Jerusalem, Israel



***Next Year in Jerusalem!***



## Israel Pride Week

Join hundreds of thousands of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people from all over the world for Pride festivals and parades in Jerusalem.

Come and celebrate in Israel, a place of freedom and acceptance for the LGBT community.

 **blueStar**  
www.bluestarpr.org



**Figure 1 A Blue Star flyer promoting gay tourism to Israel ("Blue Star PR Fem/Pinkwashing Posters.")**



# Celebrate Pride in Israel



Israel is one of the most "gay friendly" countries in the world. Israel is progressive regarding LGBT rights:

- Allows LGBT citizens to openly serve in all ranks in the military
- Recognizes foreign same-sex marriages.

The annual Pride parade in Tel Aviv is the largest in the entire Mediterranean basin. But its not just Lesbians and Gays who attend – the parade attracts a lot of other cheering spectators as well.

**Visit Israel and join us!**  [www.bluestar.co.il](http://www.bluestar.co.il)

Figure 2 Another Blue Star Advertisements promoting gay tourism to Israel. This one claims that the Tel Aviv Pride parade is the largest in the region, setting up a comparison between Israel and the rest of the Middle East. ("Blue Star PR Fem/Pinkwashing Posters.")

## Diverse Lifestyles

Israel continues to lead the way in protection and acceptance of diverse lifestyles.

- Israel is at the forefront of gay rights issues, prohibiting workplace discrimination in 1992, allowing openly homosexual soldiers to serve in 1993, and granting spousal benefits to same-sex couples in 1994.
- Uzi Even, a chemistry professor and nuclear weapons expert, was Israel's first openly homosexual Knesset member.
- Israeli's first drag queen, Dana International, took the country by storm in 1993 and won the Eurovision song competition in 1998.
- LGBT organizations and community centers are active throughout Israel, continuing to advocate for LGBT rights.

Figure 3 A selection from a pamphlet titled "Diversity" by Zionist organization Stand With Us. This caption promotes Israel's LGBT rights records, using very limited definitions of liberation (Stand With US, Diversity 7).



<b>Country</b>	<b>LGBT Organizations</b>	<b>Adoption Rights</b>	<b>Legalized Homosexuality</b>	<b>Legal Protection from Discrimination and Hate Crimes</b>	<b>Honor Killing Outlawed*</b>	<b>Open Military Service</b>	<b>Spousal Benefits for Same-Sex Couples</b>
<b>Egypt</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>YES</b> (But gays are prosecuted under lewd conduct laws.)	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Iran</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b> (Gays are put to death.)	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Jordan</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>YES</b> (But reports of gays seeking asylum elsewhere.)	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Lebanon</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Libya</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Palestinian Authority</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>YES</b> (But no protection from hate crimes.)	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b> (Gays are put to death.)	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Syria</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b> (Three years' imprisonment)	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Israel</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>

Figure 4 A selection from a Stand With Us pamphlet entitled "LGBT Rights in Israel and the Middle East" ("LGBT Rights in Israel and the Middle East" 5)



**Figure 5** A flyer describing the treatment of gay men in Iran. Brand Israel materials often picture violence against gay men in Arab/Muslim countries ("Iran '80 lashes for being gay.")



**Figure 6** A selection from a Stand With Us pamphlet "LGBT Rights in Israel and the Middle East" Stand With Us often uses the words like "sanctuary," "refuge" or "paradise" to imply that Israel welcomes in gay people from hostile sounding countries. ("LGBT Rights in Israel and the Middle East " 2)

Each of the three primary arguments that I have identified relies on invocation of race and nationality, as well as constructing strategic racial and national invisibilities. To resist Brand Israel campaigns, Arab queer and LGBT organizations are developing transnational alliances that shift the focus from civil rights to a queer liberation framework that addresses the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality within the context of anti-colonial struggle. Palestinian queer/LGBT organizers have argued that Brand Israel rhetoric aims to separate the Israeli government's gay rights record from its settler-colonialism and distract from its continued apartheid system.

### **Framing a Theoretical and Activist Response to Brand Israel**

Palestinian Queers for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) has been at the forefront of

transnational organizing around Brand Israel rhetoric. In a call to action addressed to queer and LGBT groups and individuals around the world, Palestinian Queers for BDS wrote:

“This Israeli ongoing oppression of the Palestinian people does not differentiate between Palestinian Queers and non Queers...Our name and struggle is often wrongly used and abused to “Pinkwash” Israel’s continued crimes against the whole Palestinian population. In the last years, Israel has been leading an international campaign that tries to present Israel as the “only democracy” and “gay haven” in the Middle East, while ironically portraying Palestinians, who suffer every single day from Israel’s state racism and terrorism, as barbaric and homophobic” (Palestinian Queers for BDS, “An Open Letter to Queer Academics, Artists, and Activists”).

Many Palestinian queer/LGBT organizations have called on queer and LGBT people to join the Palestinian-led boycott of Israel, as outlined in the 2005 Palestinian Call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (“Palestinian Civil Society Call for BDS”). By framing Brand Israel rhetoric and its response within the call for BDS, Palestinian queers have chosen to articulate opposing Brand Israel rhetoric as a part of the Palestinian national movement and as an anti-colonial endeavor (see Appendix A for the entire Palestinian Call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions).

Through their framing of anti-pinkwashing activism, Palestinian queer and LGBT organizations have challenged not only Brand Israel discourses and ongoing Israeli settler-colonialism, but also heterosexism within Palestinian society. Palestinian Queers for BDS and other queer and LGBT Arab organizations have articulated a connection between Israeli settler-colonialism and both Israeli and Palestinian understandings of the categories of sexuality and gender. Palestinians queer/LGBT organizations are calling on their allies around the world to engage in a transnational organizing project at these intersections.

### *Homonationalism*

While it is important to contend with the specificities of each activist project, any analysis of Brand Israel rhetoric and anti-pinkwashing activism must be able to account of the complex interplay between Israeli, Palestinian, and American ideologies about gender and sexuality, each shaped by separate but converging histories of settlement, displacement, and continuing racial discrimination.

The idea that Brand Israel discourses come out of the legacy of colonialism is one of the primary arguments developed by anti-pinkwashing activists and academics (see Puar, “The Golden Handcuffs of Gay Rights: How Pinkwashing Distorts Both LGBTIQ and Anti-Occupation Activism.”, Mikdashi, “Palestinian Civil Society Call for BDS”, “Palestinian Queers for BDS Call”, “Pinkwatching”, “Pinkwashing Presentation”, and Stelder). However, the specific ways that Brand Israel rhetoric is a part of Zionist and British settler-colonial discourses have not been adequately developed in activist and scholarly literature, even though this assumption is encoded in most anti-pinkwashing writing and activism. Instead, many academic theorists use the concept of homonationalism to analyze Brand Israel rhetoric.

The term “homonationalism” was developed by Jasbir Puar to describe the way that liberal politics incorporate certain queer subjects into the nation-state while replicating narrow racial, class, gender and national ideologies and power relations. In her book Terrorist Assemblages, Puar argues that the inclusion of queer subjects into the US nation-state depends specifically on distinguishing “properly homo” subjects from orientalized “terrorist” bodies. Puar roots her analysis in the political and cultural landscape of the post September 11<sup>th</sup> United States. She

contends, however, that the ideas of homonationalism have global resonance, calling homonationalism "reflective of a neo-liberal phenomenon happening in many, many national locations (Puar, "Citation and Censorship" 141).

Puar points out that homonationalism rests on the belief the United States is both exceptional itself and surviving under exceptional circumstances. Puar writes that "Exceptionalism paradoxically signals distinction from (to be unlike, dissimilar) as well as excellence (imminence, superiority), suggesting a departure from yet mastery of linear teleologies of progress" ("Terrorist Assemblages" 3). Puar also uses exceptionalism to refer to justifications of state violence during times of crisis, such as the US war on terrorism. Puar points out those ideologies of exceptionalism hold sway in both the United States and Israel. Puar has used the ideas of homonationalism and exceptionalism to shape her extensive lecturing and writing about Brand Israel. Puar points out that the civil rights gains of Jewish gay and lesbian citizens of Israel come explicitly at the expense of Palestinians ("The Golden Handcuffs of Gay Rights: How Pinkwashing Distorts Both LGBTIQ and Anti-Occupation Activism"). The civil rights gains of the Israeli LGBT movements were justified, in part, by the mainstream Israeli movement arguing that gay men made excellent soldiers and lesbians made excellent mothers—two explicit appeals to inclusion based on nationalism (Ziv 2). Puar writes that Brand Israel rhetoric is "made possible and legible through the political and social efficacy of homonationalism as a structuring force of neoliberal modernity" (Puar and Mikdashi, "Pinkwatching and Pinkwashing").

### *Questioning Homonationalism as a Theoretical Lens*

Recently, academics and Palestinian queer activists have questioned whether Puar's ideas about homonationalism are adequate to the task of analyzing Brand Israel rhetoric. A lively debate on the framing of anti-pinkwashing activism is taking place amongst scholars, activists, and other concerned people both in Palestine and abroad. On August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012, Puar and Maya Mikdashi published an article that ignited fierce debates online and within many pro-Palestine activist communities, including the Chicago-based Palestinian solidarity organizations in which I participate. In this article, entitled “Pinkwatching and Pinkwashing: Interpenetration and its Discontents,” Puar and Mikdashi claim that US-based anti-pinkwashing activism – which they call “pinkwatching” – reproduces the discourses that make Brand Israel rhetoric possible. Puar and Mikdashi argue that anti-pinkwashing activism should turn its attention to the settler-colonialism within the United States and discuss more fully the way that homonationalism structures the debate on gay rights in Israel and the debate about US intervention in Iraq and Iran. Puar and Mikdashi argue that when US-based anti-pinkwashing activists fail to reflect on how homonationalism operates within the United States, they reinforce the homonationalism on which Brand Israel rhetoric relies.

Haneen Maikey, co-founder of Al-Qaws and Palestinian Queers for BDS, and Heike Schotten wrote a response to Puar and Mikdashi's article. Schotten and Maikey argue that and Puar and Mikdashi rely too heavily on the idea of homonationalism. “This framework,” they write, “obscures the specific manifestations of pinkwashing in the Palestinian context, rendering Palestine somehow beside the point” (Schotten and Maikey). Schotten and Maikey argue that

Brand Israel campaigns should be understood as a part of ongoing *nakba*<sup>2</sup>, the displacement of Palestinian people from their land. Their argument points to the way that Puar generalizes US political ideology globally without sufficiently accounting for difference in politics and ideology from location to location.

### **Recovering Historical Context Through Examining Colonial Rhetoric About Women's Rights**

Puar's concept of homonationalism also neglects to take into account the historical context of Brand Israel rhetoric, focusing instead on the impact of the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks. I argue that Brand Israel rhetoric draws on a legacy of colonial rhetoric that justified colonial domination as "saving" colonized peoples. In the Middle East, British and French colonial authorities claimed that Muslim and Arab women needed to be rescued from the practice of veiling. This argument was successfully used by colonial authorities to justify the domination of both Egypt and Algeria. For example, Marnia Lazeg, quoted by feminist scholar Lila Abu Lughod, described an event organized by the French Algerian government on May 16, 1958. At a government-organized demonstration, a group of Algerian women ceremonially unveiled by French women (Abu Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving" 785). British government officials used similar arguments about the necessity of "saving" women were used to justify the British colonization of India. In 2002, US President George W. Bush used the same rhetoric to justify US military intervention in Afghanistan (Abu Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving" 784). Describing the cultures of colonized people as backward and sexist

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<sup>2</sup> The Arabic word *nakba* or *الناكبة* means catastrophe. It is used by Palestinians to refer to forced expulsion of more 750,000 Palestinians from their villages before and after the declaration of the Israeli state. Palestinian activists refer to the ongoing displacement of Palestinians from their land as a continuing *nakba*.

has been proven to be one effective way justify colonialism.

I argue that Brand Israel rhetoric can be understood through the context of the colonial rhetoric about women's rights that I have just described. Therefore, I examine Brand Israel-style ads about both women's and LGBT rights to illuminate connections between Brand Israel rhetoric and colonial discourses about Arab/Muslim women. By placing Brand Israel campaigns in this historical context, anti-pinkwashing activists can better understand how Brand Israel rhetoric replicates racist, colonial discourses and how to best resist them. By using Arab feminist theory to draw parallels between Brand Israel rhetoric and invocations of women's rights, I will analyze Brand Israel rhetoric in a way that better preserves the specificity of the Palestinian situation than Puar's use of homonationalism while continuing to account for the US audience to which Brand Israel rhetoric appeals. I use feminist scholarship like this to provide an important supplement to Puar's ideas about homonationalism, while preserving Puar's valuable insights.

## **Methodology**

To illuminate the historical context of Brand Israel rhetoric, I use discourse analysis to identify the arguments and themes of Brand Israel materials from two of the leading Brand Israel organizations. Discourse analysis allows me to examine both written and visual elements of Brand Israel rhetoric for their cultural and historical meaning. The Brand Israel strategy has been employed by numerous private Israel advocacy organizations which invest extensive resources in developing and disseminating advocacy material and programming. These organizations emphasize training new leaders to argue on behalf of



Israeli policies and providing materials for use in pro-Israel advocacy efforts. Because of their emphasis on developing rhetoric to be used by pro-Israeli activists, these organizations have developed and disseminated numerous iterations of Brand Israel arguments. Therefore, I have chosen to base my analysis on the material of two prominent Israel advocacy organizations: Stand With Us and Blue Star.

Both Stand With Us and Blue Star provide materials and training to activists seeking to advocate for Israel within in the United States. Each is influential within the United States and has explicitly stated that they use Brand Israel rhetoric. Both of these organizations have developed numerous materials about both LGBT rights and women in Israel and the Middle East. Therefore, they are illustrative case studies for comparing Brand Israel discourses to discourses about Arab and Muslim women. Limiting my analysis to these two influential sources allows me to carefully consider them in their totality, while also being able to reasonably generalize about Brand Israel rhetoric.

### ***Stand With Us***

Stand With Us describes itself as an international education organization aimed at sharing “Israel’s side of the story” (Stand With Us, “About”). On its website, Stand With Us writes, “Through print materials, speakers, programs, conferences, missions to Israel, campaigns, and internet resources, we ensure that the story of Israel’s achievements and ongoing challenges is told on campuses and in communities, the media, libraries, and churches around the world” (Stand With Us, “About”). Stand With Us produces pamphlets, fliers, infographics, and booklets, as well as sponsoring speakers, student

conferences and training seminars and runs an intensive advocacy fellowship program. Stand With Us has fourteen offices in the United States, the UK, and Israel (Stand With Us, “About”) and distributes their advocacy resources widely. Through Stand With Us writes materials about a variety of subjects, in 2009, Stand With Us also told the Jerusalem Post that they were undertaking a campaign “to improve Israel’s image through the gay community in Israel” (Schulman). I have found Stand With Us materials at every Brand Israel event I have attended in the city of Chicago. The reach of Stand With Us is long and they are open about their attempts to appeal to queer and LGBT communities, making the appropriate for my analysis. For examples of Stand With Us materials, see figures 3, 4, and 6.

### ***Blue Star***

Like Stand With Us, Blue Star’s mission is to provide resources for young people advocating for Israeli policies. Blue Star describes itself as “a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to empowering the next generation of Israel advocates and leader” (Blue Star, “About Us”). They write, “Our project disseminates free resources for campus and community activists and teachers and free Israel education programs” (Blue Star, “Focus Groups Test Results”). These education programs are aimed at developing young leaders able to make effective arguments for Israel and its politics. Blue Star describes their marketing techniques as “hasbartizing.” This term combines the Hebrew word “hasbara” meaning explanation, or propaganda<sup>3</sup> with the English word “advertising” (Blue

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<sup>3</sup> The best translation for *hasbara* or הַסְבָּרָה is debated because the meaning of the word differs based on context. Its literal meaning is explanation, but it is also used to mean propaganda. I have chosen to preserve this nuance by listing both meanings.

Star, “Focus Groups Test Results”). This technique closely mirrors Israeli marketing strategies by emphasizing the importance of advertising and the desire to make Israel relevant and welcoming to a US audience (Katz). For examples of Blue Star materials, see figures 1, 2, and 5.

### **Theoretical Frameworks and Structure**

To analyze Stand With Us and Blue Star materials, I use two theoretical lenses. First, in chapter two, I use the work of Arab feminists, including Leila Ahmed, Lila Abu-Lughod, Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Suhad Daher-Nashif, to demonstrate how Stand With Us and Blue Star use colonial rhetoric about Arab women to frame their discussion of gay rights. I discuss how Arab feminists have understood rhetoric that justifies colonial and military intervention in the name of “saving” Arab and Muslim women. Then I examine how Stand With Us and Blue Star use the category “honor killing” to explain violence against both women and queer/LGBT people as a product of Arab/Muslim culture.

In chapter three, I further develop the historical context of Brand Israel rhetoric through queer and transgender lenses. Through queer and transgender theorists, I describe how gender, race, and sexuality have been defined in relation to each other through colonial processes in both the United States and Palestine. Then I analyze the Stand With Us materials that describe gay Palestinian men as potential suicide bombers through Joey Mogul’s ideas about queer criminal archetypes. Finally, I use Judith Jack Halberstam’s discussion of queer visibility to demonstrate how Brand Israel rhetoric uses images of an urban Israel to construct Israel as modern and Palestine as traditional, regressive, and backward.

In the fourth chapter, I examine materials produced by prominent organizations and anti-pinkwashing campaigns in order to understand how anti-pinkwashing activists are challenging Brand Israel discourses. I analyze the theory and online materials produced Arab queer and LGBT organizations: Palestinian Queers for BDS and Al Qaws. These organizations have taken the lead in organizing transnational boycotts and in countering Brand Israel campaigns. I also analyze material and news reports of queer Palestinian solidarity activists in North America. Palestinian Queers for BDS have proposed a resistance framework that locates queer struggles as a part of colonial struggles. They articulate goals that extend beyond gay rights, enabling them to build bridges with other movements, like critical transgender activism, that are focused on queer liberation.

I am excited by the potential of anti-pinkwashing activism to challenge racism within queer and LGBT communities in the United States and shift the focus of our activism from civil rights to a movement for queer liberation within a more intersectional framework. I hope that my research will further the growing scholarship and activism articulating connections between race, gender, sexuality, and settler-colonialism.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Proven Strategies: Analyzing Brand Israel Rhetoric through Arab Feminist Theory**

#### **Introduction**

Brand Israel rhetoric about gay rights cannot be understood outside of the history of colonial rhetoric about Arab and Muslim women's rights. Since the Victorian era, Western powers, particularly Britain, France and the United States, have justified the colonial domination of the Middle East by claiming that Arab and Muslim women are in need of liberation (Abu-Lughod, "The Muslim Woman"). Today, this argument is used by American politicians to justify military intervention in the Middle East (Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?" 783) and to justify the Israeli occupation and settler-colonial project in Brand Israel materials. In this chapter, I argue that both Stand With Us and Blue Star use colonial rhetoric about Arab/Muslim women to frame their arguments about Israel's gay rights record. Stand With Us and Blue Star present arguments about women's and LGBT rights side by side in the same flyers and pamphlets. They use parallel arguments to use women's rights and LGBT rights to represent Israel as liberal and civilized, while presenting Palestinian and Arab and Muslim culture oppressive to minorities. Furthermore, Stand With Us and Blue Star use colonial ideas, like the concept of "honor killings" to characterize oppression of queer/LGBT individuals in Arab/Muslim countries. I examine how Brand Israel arguments about LGBT rights are a continuation of a rhetorical strategy that has already been proven to work to justify many colonial contexts.

## **Arab Feminist Theory as a Historical Context for Brand Israel Rhetoric**

Arab feminist scholar Suha Sabbagh describes the act of justifying colonial and military intervention in the Middle East through women's rights, as using "Arab women as a stick with which to beat the Arab world" (Sabbagh xxvi). Stand With Us and Blue Star use both women's rights and gay rights to present Israel as superior to Palestine and therefore justify its dominating Palestine. In the hands of Brand Israel, gay rights are also used to justify colonialism and military intervention. In order to describe how Stand with Us and Blue Star arguments draw upon rhetoric that dates from colonial times, I will discuss how Arab feminists have analyzed colonial rhetoric about women beginning with feminist scholar Leila Ahmed.

In her book Women and Gender in Islam, Ahmed describes how colonialist discourses used feminism to justify the imperial domination of the Middle East. Ahmed takes the example of Lord Cromer, the British consul general in Egypt from 1883 to 1907. Cromer railed against Islam and Egyptian culture for their treatment of women. Cromer argued that Egyptians should be forced to abandon the veil in order to liberate Egyptian women. However, Cromer introduced educational policies in Egypt that actually disadvantaged girls by making education less obtainable (Ahmed 137). Meanwhile, in Britain he founded the Men's League for Opposing Women's Suffrage. Ahmed discusses in detail the ideology that shaped Cromer's actions. She argues that the fixation of British colonial authorities on women came out of a long and rich legacy of misinformation and prejudice against Muslims that was combined with Victorian ideas about cultural inferiority. Ahmed writes,

In the colonial era, the colonial powers especially Britain (on which I will focus my discussion), developed their theories of races and cultures and of a social evolutionary sequence according to which middle-class Victorian England, and its beliefs and practices, stood at the culminating point of the evolutionary

process and represented the model of ultimate civilization. In this scheme Victorian womanhood and mores with respect to women, along with other aspects of society at the colonial center, were regarded as the ideal and measure of civilization (Ahmed 151).

Ahmed sums up an Arab feminist analysis of the use of colonial rhetoric by writing, “The idea that Other men, men in colonized societies or societies beyond the borders of the civilized West, oppressed women was used, in the rhetoric of colonialism, to render morally justifiable its project of undermining and eradicating the cultures of colonized people” (Ahmed 151 ).

Private citizens, including British women, also played a role in justifying British colonial intervention in Egypt by using the rhetoric of women’s rights. Many British women who traveled to the Middle East as missionaries argued that their Muslim sisters needed their civilizing influence. For example, Lila Abu-Lughod cites proceedings of a Presbyterian women's missionary conference held in Cairo, Egypt, in 1906. In this document, missionary women describe “the sad plight of the Mohammedan woman (as she was known then) in countries from Egypt to Indonesia, detailing the lack of love in her marriage, her ignorance, her subjection to polygamy, her seclusion, and the symbolic evidence of her low status in her veiling.” (Abu-Lughod, “The Muslim Woman”). Abu-Lughod quotes missionary Annie Van Sommer who wrote the following in an introduction entitled *Our Moslem Sisters: A Cry of Need from Lands of Darkness Interpreted by Those Who Heard It*:

"This book with its sad, reiterated story of wrong and oppression is an indictment and an appeal [...] It is an appeal to Christian womanhood to right these wrongs and enlighten this darkness by sacrifice and service...It seems to some of us that it needs the widespread love and pity of the women of our day in Christian lands to seek and save the suffering sinful needy women of Islam. You cannot know how great the need unless you are told; you will never go and find them until you hear their cry." (Abu-Lughod, “The Muslim Woman”)

Abu-Lughod argues that Western Christian women saw themselves as speaking on behalf of Muslim women, all in the service of the mission of Christian Evangelism. They believed that

Islam and Arab culture was the source of Muslim women's oppression and missionary women saw themselves as instrumental to both the worldly and spiritual liberation of these women.

Abu-Lughod notes that, "This, of course, is in Victorian times when women didn't have the vote, were rarely in the public sphere, were supposed to have been angels in the house" ("The Muslim Woman").

The missionary rhetoric employed by British women helped to establish a belief in the superiority of white women over brown women around the world. This rhetoric not only justified the colonial domination of the Middle East, India and other countries, but was also used to argue for white women's suffrage. Historian Antoinette Burton argues British women based their argument for the vote on the idea that their moral authority as white women was necessary to the project of the British Empire. When British white women argued they deserved the vote, they did so by claiming that they were the mothers of the white race and therefore were uniquely positioned to build the British Empire. Burton writes, "Arguments about racial motherhood provided a political entrée into the imperial nation even as they worked to justify female emancipation in it. Immersed in these discourses of feminist imperial authority, British women were readily able to imagine Indian women as the deserving (because colonial and apparently unemancipated) objects of their imperial patronage" (Burton 51).

Under this rhetoric, the necessity of "saving" Indian and Arab women, and other women who were the colonial subjects of the British Empire was used by feminists to argue for granting the vote to British women. For example, Burton writes that "Indian women – transformed in feminist discourse into the right and proper colonial clientele of British women – help to ratify the public space as imperial and to justify British women's right to participation in it" (Burton 34). This historical context suggests that the justification of the acceptance of some gay people



into the nation state at the direct expense of others should be understood as a part of a larger history of racism and empire (Bracke 237). As I wrote in the previous chapter, many theorists have used Jasbir Puar's concept of homonationalism to explain the inclusion of white, cis-gender gay people into the nation state, while non-white LGBT subjects, trans, and queer people remain comparatively excluded. However, the history that I have outlined suggests that acceptance of certain members of oppressed groups into nation state at the explicit expense of others is less a contemporary phenomenon than a colonial one. Through positioning themselves as saviors of colonized women, white British women argued for women's rights and justified Britain's colonial enterprise.

### ***Contemporary Invocations of Colonial Rhetoric***

Today, the colonial rhetoric about Arab women is deployed to justify contemporary imperial and settler-colonial projects. Many Arab feminists have written extensively about how ideas about "women's oppression" have been invoked to justify US imperial projects in Iraq and Afghanistan and future military intervention in Iran. In her article, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?" Abu-Lughod describes how colonial discourses about Arab women were used by the Bush administration to justify military intervention in Afghanistan. Abu-Lughod quotes Laura Bush who attempted to illicit women's support for military intervention in Afghanistan by saying, "Because of our recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes, They can listen to music and teach their daughters without fear of punishment, The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women" (Ab-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?" 784). Abu-Lughod's analysis puts the contemporary invocation of women's rights in a historical context that draws out both the specific context of the US war on terrorism and the

ideological legacy of colonialism. She writes, “We need to be wary when Lord Cormer in British-ruled Egypt...and Laura Bush, all with military troops behind them, claim to be saving or liberating Muslim women” (Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?” 785). Like many white feminists and women missionaries during the Victorian era, many contemporary feminist organizations have been complicit justifying colonial projects and military intervention through women’s rights (See Abu-Lughod, Ahmed, McClintock, Sabbagh, Schitck et al., and Weber). In her article, “The Feminist Majority Foundation’s Campaign to Stop Gender Apartheid,” Ann Russo writes about how the Feminist Majority Foundation supported US military intervention in Afghanistan through advocacy steeped in orientalist representations of Afghan women, particularly images that focused on veiling and gender segregation (see figure 7 for an example of these images). The Feminist Majority Foundation did not join in political mobilizations against intervention in Afghanistan. Instead, they welcomed what they described as new attention on the plight of Afghan women. Russo points out that the Feminist Majority Foundation’s attempts to challenge hegemony in fact reinforced US hegemony. She writes, “This Orientalist logic constructs an absolute difference between the ‘West’ and the ‘East’/‘self’ and ‘other’. It does so by erasing the history and politics of Afghanistan and by projecting a cultural barbarity in need of a civilizing mission” (Russo 558-9)



**Figure 7** A photograph from Feminist Majority Foundation, showing women as victims of Muslim patriarchy rather than empowered agents (Feminist Majority Foundation).

Through the lens of Arab feminism, it is possible similarly to place Brand Israel discourses about gay rights in a historical context and understand their persuasive power to United States audiences. The theorists I have discussed demonstrate that colonial discourses still influence governmental policy today and are persuasive to the US public, the primary audience of Brand Israel materials. In the next section of this chapter I argue that Stand With Us and Blue Star draw on this colonial rhetoric about women to frame their discussion of gay rights.

### **Colonial Rhetoric in Brand Israel Ads: Using Women's Rights to Frame Gay Rights**

The colonial rhetoric that I have described forms more than just the historical context of Israeli Brand Israel style advertisements. Blue Star and Stand With Us use these discourses to frame their argument that Israel deserves support because of its gay rights record. Stand With Us and Blue Star often discuss women's rights and gay rights together and using parallel arguments and even similar phrasing, formatting, and aesthetics. To demonstrate this, I will discuss four Stand With Us and Blue Star ads, reproduced in figures 8-11.

In both Stand With Us and Blue Star materials, women's rights and gay rights create a single narrative about liberal democracy and modernity. Figure 8 is a double-page spread in pamphlet entitled *Diversity*, written by Stand With Us. In these two pages, Stand With Us describes first the "Advancements of Women" and then the "Diverse Lifestyles" of Israeli LGBT community. Stand With Us then argues that both Israeli women and LGBT Israelis enjoy civil rights and government representation, notably the right to serve in the military. Absent from this ad is any discussion of how these rights are not equally available to all women living under Israeli civil jurisdiction. This ad demonstrates how Brand Israel frames women's and gay rights together.

Because women's rights have been used to justify colonialism, by pairing women's and LGBT rights together, Brand Israel subtly implies that colonialism is justified because it "saves" gay people.

Both Stand With Us and Blue Star often argue that Israel is more democratic and progressive by directly comparing selective civil rights indicators in Israel and the rest of the Middle East. They invoke both women's and LGBT rights in similar ways and often together. Figure 9 is a Stand With Us ad entitled "Women's Rights and Sexual Freedom in the Middle East." In this ad, Stand With Us presents two tables side by side, one about women's rights and the other about gay rights. Stand with Us lists nine Middle East countries, including both Israel and Palestine, under the label Palestinian Authority. In the table on the left-hand side of the page, Stand With Us considers three women's rights indicators: women's literacy rate, travel restrictions, and the percentage of the women in the labor force. It is striking how these indicators echo the list of concerns of the Presbyterian missionary women, the education, travel restrictions, and seclusion described by Lila Abu-Lughod.

## Advancement of Women

Since the founding of Israel in 1948, women have played a vital role in governing, developing, and protecting the nation.

- In 1969, Golda Meir became Israel's first female prime minister, the third elected female leader of any country.
- Israeli women remain active at all levels of government, as evidenced by Israel's 2008 foreign minister, Tzipi Livni; Speaker of the Knesset (Israel's parliament) Dalia Itzik; and High Court judge Dorit Beinisch.
- Israeli women serve in all branches of the Israel Defense Forces, are eligible for conscription, and serve alongside men in all units.
- Women represent 45 percent of Israel's labor force, the same percentage as in the United States.



## Diverse Lifestyles

Israel continues to lead the way in protection and acceptance of diverse lifestyles.

- Israel is at the forefront of gay rights issues, prohibiting workplace discrimination in 1992, allowing openly homosexual soldiers to serve in 1993, and granting spousal benefits to same-sex couples in 1994.
- Uzi Even, a chemistry professor and nuclear weapons expert, was Israel's first openly homosexual Knesset member.
- Israel's first drag queen, Dana International, took the country by storm in 1993 and won the Eurovision song competition in 1998.
- LGBT organizations and community centers are active throughout Israel, continuing to advocate for LGBT rights.

Figure 8 A selection from Diversity by Stand With Us (“Diversity 8-9”)

# WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Country	% Literate (Age 15 and older)	Travel Restrictions (Require husband's or male relative's consent)	% of Women in Labor Force
Egypt	61.2% women	YES	21%
Iran	34.2% women	YES	12%
Iraq	55% women	YES	18%
Jordan	21.6% women	YES	21%
Libya	37% women	YES	21%
Palestinian Authority	23% women	N/A	11.4%
Saudi Arabia	49.8% women	YES	13%
Syria	44.2% women	YES	19%
Israel	7% women	NO	45% (same as US statistics)

Literacy Sources: A Gap Analysis report on the Status of Palestinian Women Prepared by Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling, [www.wclac.org](http://www.wclac.org). CIA Factbook (2000) at [www.gov/cia/publications/pubs.html](http://www.gov/cia/publications/pubs.html)

Travel Restrictions: US Dep't of State, 1999 Human Rights Report, at [www.state.gov/g/drl/hrr/c1470.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/hrr/c1470.htm)

Work force: UN Stats [unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/wv2000/tables.html](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/wv2000/tables.html)

# SEXUAL FREEDOM

Country	Homosexuality Legal	Legal Protection for Gays from discrimination and hate crimes	Honor Killing* Outlawed
Egypt	YES (But gays are prosecuted under lewd conduct laws.)	NO	NO
Iran	NO (Gays are put to death.)	NO	NO
Jordan	YES (But reports of gays seeking asylum elsewhere)	NO	NO
Lebanon	NO	NO	N/A
Libya	NO	NO	N/A
Palestinian Authority	YES (But no protection from hate crimes)	NO	NO
Saudi Arabia	NO (Gays are put to death.)	NO	NO
Syria	NO (3 years imprisonment)	NO	NO
Israel	YES	YES	YES

\* "Honor killing" is when a male kills a female family member who has had sex – or is rumored to have had sex – outside of marriage, either by choice or because she was raped. Some countries have no or only light penalties for this kind of killing.

Figure 9 “Women’s Rights and Sexual Freedom in the Middle East” by Stand with Us (“Women's Rights in the Middle East”)



**Where in the Middle East are daughters valued as much as sons?**



**Israel.**

Just like American women, Israeli women are free to lead, free to write and publish, free to be themselves, free to dress as they please, free to date who they want, free to drive, free to work, free to choose their own mates, free to study, free to travel abroad without the consent of a male relative, and free to make reproductive choices.


Women in the surrounding Muslim countries are still waiting.

According to Khaled Al-Qudra, former Attorney General in the Palestinian National Authority, 70% of all murders in Gaza and the West Bank are honor killings [of Palestinian women by their families].

 **blueStarPR**  
The Jewish Ink Tank  
[www.bluestarpr.com](http://www.bluestarpr.com)

**Figure 10 “Where in the Middle East are Daughters Valued as Much as Sons?” by Blue Star (“Where in the Middle East are daughters”)**

**Where In The Middle East Can  
Gay Officers  
Serve Their Country?**




**Only in Israel**

In a democracy, positions of leadership and political office are open to all citizens, no matter their race, religion, or sexual orientation.

The Israeli Declaration of Independence guarantees all citizens freedom of religion, conscience, language, education, culture, and equal access to holy sites.

**Support Democracy. Support Israel.**

 **blueStarPR**  
The Jewish Ink Tank  
[www.bluestarpr.com](http://www.bluestarpr.com)

**Figure 10 “Where in the Middle East can Gay Officers Serve Their Country?” by Blue Star (“Where in the Middle East can Gay”)**

In the next table, Stand With Us lists the same nine countries and three LGBT rights indicators: the legality of homosexuality, legal protection from discrimination, and the legality of what Stand With Us calls honor killings. Stand With Us defines honor killings as “when a male kills a female family member who has had sex – or is rumored to have had sex – outside of marriage, either by choice or because she was raped” (“Women's Rights in the Middle East”). I will consider this description and this category more in the next section of this chapter. In both of these ads, Stand With Us claims that Israel has better women’s and LGBT rights record than other Middle East countries. This table collapses differences between Arab and Muslim countries, presenting the Middle East instead as divided into two dichotomous parts. This presents culture and religion as responsible for the legal status of women and gay people in the Middle East, ignoring both the many differences between these countries, the differences between women within them, and the role of colonialism and military occupation in creating the conditions in which women and LGBT people live.

In figures 8 and 9, Stand With Us discusses women’s rights and LGBT rights together, making direct comparisons between Israel and the rest of the Middle East. In figures 10 and 11, Blue Star accomplishes the same thing through two different ads. In figure 10, the headline asks, “Where in the Middle East are Daughters Valued as Much as Sons?” Then, below a photograph of what appears to a happy family with two daughters and a son, Blue Star answers, “Israel.” Underneath the photograph, the caption reads “Just like American women, Israeli women are free to lead, free to write and publish, free to be themselves, free to dress as they please, free to date who they want, free to drive, free to work, free to choose their own mates, free to study, free to travel abroad without the consent of a male relative, and free to make reproductive choices” (“Where in the Middle East Are Women”). Then, in bold, Blue Star writes, “Women in the



surrounding Muslim countries are still waiting.” Again, they reference honor killings. This advertisement creates the impression that Arab and Muslim women are oppressed in every way that white, Jewish Israeli women are free. Moreover, this ad argues that Israel is like the United States – and that the rest of the Middle East, by implication, is not. This presentation depicts Israel as Western and modern and exceptional in the Middle East because of the status of women, a clear echo of the colonial rhetoric I have already described. In figure 11, Blue Star characterizes Israel in the same way, this time using gay rights. Using a similar font and layout, Blue Star writes, “Where in the Middle East can Gay Officers Serve their Country?” Once again, the answer is “Only in Israel.” In the caption below a photograph of a soldier, Blue Star praises Israel for the civil rights it offers its citizens, without any consideration for how race and nationality shape who has access to those rights. These two ads argue that Israel is superior to its neighbors using parallel arguments about women and queer/LGBT people. They once again paint Israel to be a liberal haven that is more similar to the United States and Western Europe than the rest of the Middle East.

These four ads typify the centrality of rhetoric about women rights to the way that Stand With Us and Blue Star accomplishes the goals of the Brand Israel strategy and frames the argument that it makes about gay rights. Because women’s rights are understood, thanks to the colonial history I have described, as a primary marker of civilization and superiority, Stand With Us and Blue Star describe Israel’s women’s rights record into order to present Israel as liberal, modern, and similar to the United States. Stand With Us and Blue Star then present gay rights framed within the same argument. Stand With Us and Blue Star discuss women’s rights and gay rights together, using the same terms and even similar ascetics to create a single picture of Israel as a liberal haven– and a corresponding picture of Palestine and Arab/Muslim cultures as backward and

regressive. In the ads that I have discussed so far, this characterization is mostly implied through praising Israeli society and presenting it as an exception to the rest of the Middle East. Stand With Us and Blue Star mostly avoid making overtly racist statements because doing so would damage the impression of Israel as a liberal democracy. Nonetheless, the colonial history that I have described has created a powerful bias against Arab and Muslim people on which Stand With Us and Blue Star base their arguments.

In the next section of this paper, I will discuss in more depth how Stand With Us and Blue Star draw on colonial rhetoric about women and then use that same rhetoric to frame their discussion of gay rights. To do so, I will analyze an ad that makes direct comparisons between Israel and the rest of the Middle East using explicitly colonial terms: “Middle East Apartheid Today” by Stand With Us.

### **Colonial Rhetoric in Stand With Us’ “Middle East Apartheid Today”**

“What images do we, in the United States or Europe, have of Muslim women, or women from the region known as the Middle East?” asks Lila Abu-Lughod (“The Muslim Woman”). “Our lives are saturated with images, images that are strangely confined to a very limited set of tropes or themes. The oppressed Muslim woman. The veiled Muslim woman. The Muslim woman who does not have the same freedoms we have. The woman ruled by her religion. The woman ruled by her men” (Abu-Lughod, “The Muslim Woman”). Stand With Us draws on exactly this rhetoric in the pamphlet “Middle East Apartheid Today,” Stand with Us writes, “Women are the most vulnerable members of Palestinian society as the law and order in the region does not provide them with a safe and comfortable environment” (“Middle East Apartheid Today” 9). On the following page, the writer continues by discussing the status of women in “Arab league countries” and “Islamic countries.” This argument fails to account for how military and colonial

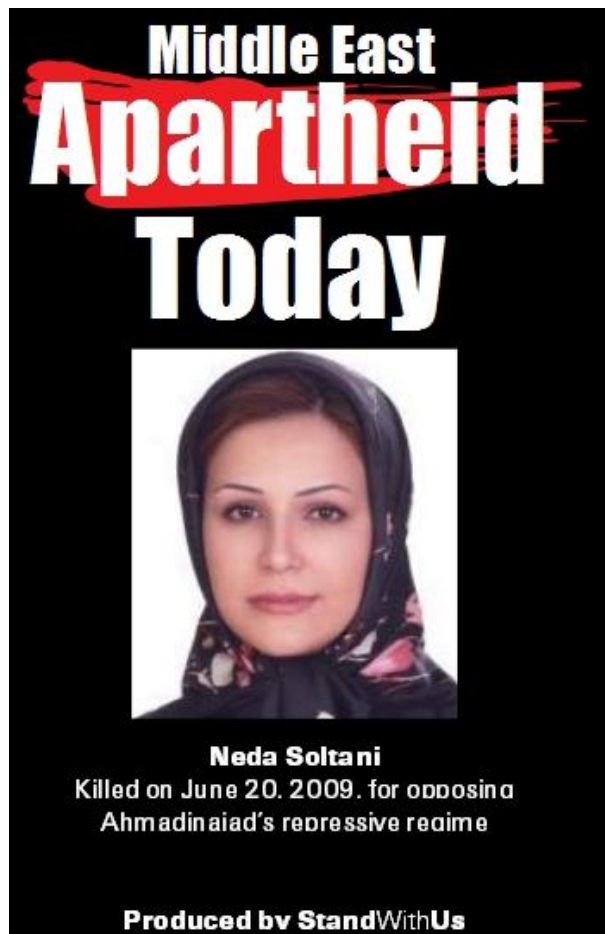


Figure 12 Cover of “Middle East Apartheid Today” by Stand With Us (“Middle East Apartheid Today” 1)

domination in the region has impacted women’s rights. Instead, Stand With Us simply implies that Arab and Muslim societies are simply a context in which women cannot thrive. Stand With Us does not distinguish between one Arab/Muslim country and another. Likewise, Stand With Us does not acknowledge differences between women. Nowhere does Stand With Us mention Christian Arab women, Mizahri Jews, who are of Arab ethnicity, or another ethnic groups in the Middle East, including the Druze, the Bedouin, and many immigrant populations. Instead, Stand With Us repeats sweeping descriptions of Arab and Muslim women that echo the colonial rhetoric I described earlier:

- “Women in many Islamic countries are forced to cover their faces (Stand With Us, “Middle East Apartheid Today” 10)
- “Saudi women and men walk on separate sidewalks. Women in Saudi Arabia are not allowed to drive. Iran, Jordan, Syria, and Egypt are some of the Middle Eastern countries that restrict women’s right to travel without “permission” from a male guardian” (Stand With Us, “Middle East Apartheid Today” 10).

- “No laws protect women against domestic violence. Rape is blamed on women, even if they are young children. Rapists can escape legal punishment by marrying their victims. In Iran and Saudi Arabia, the female victims are often punished for ‘immorality.’ Women’s court testimony is worth less than men’s, especially in cases of rape and domestic violence. Family law requires wives’ ‘obedience’ to husbands, who are legally ‘heads of the household.’ Women can be forced into arranged marriages” (Stand With Us, “Middle East Apartheid Today” 11)

Lila Abu-Lughod points out that Palestinian theorist Edward Said wrote in his book Orientalism that colonial rhetoric about the Middle East relies on the citation of images that gradually are accepted as true, primarily through their reproduction. Abu-Lughod extends Said’s critique by applying it to representations of Arab women. She writes, “What [Said] meant by this is that later works gain authority by citing earlier ones, referring to each other in an endless chain that has no need for the actualities of the Muslim East. We can see this even today in visual representations of the Muslim woman” (Abu-Lughod, “The Muslim Woman”). Stand With Us cites these common images of Arab women to invoke a narrative about Arab culture that is already familiar to United States audiences. In this section, I will describe how Stand With Us draws on colonial rhetoric through arguments about three subjects: apartheid framework, honor killings and veiling. In this pamphlet, each of these subjects are used to describe Israel as superior to Palestine, thereby justifying Israeli occupation and colonial domination.

### ***Apartheid Framing: Deflecting Attention from Structural Violence and Injustice***

In “Middle East Apartheid Today,” over the course of 32 pages, Stand With Us claims that Middle East societies, except Israel, are apartheid systems. The apartheid system, they argue, is based primarily on gender and sexuality, though Stand With Us also briefly argues that the

Middle East is also characterized by what it calls religious apartheid, racism, and apartheid based on national identity. In order to understand the significance of this pamphlet, it is important to discuss the context in which it was written and what prompted this framing.

Stand With Us indicates on their website that they developed these materials in a deliberate attempt to counter activists, thinkers, and public officials who have described parallels between South Africa Apartheid and Israel's domination of Palestine. This pamphlet is listed under a section of their website devoted to countering "Apartheid Week" a reference to Israeli Apartheid week. Organizers write that Israeli Apartheid week is an annual event that aims to "educate people about the nature of Israel as an apartheid system and to build Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaigns as part of a growing global BDS movement" (Israeli Apartheid Week).

### ***The Apartheid Framing and International Law***

Both activists and public officials have claimed that Israel is guilty of crimes of apartheid, a violation of international law. In 1973, the United Nations general assembly adopted the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid which defined crimes of apartheid as "inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group ... over another racial group ... and systematically oppressing them" (Dugard, "International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid"). In 2002, the crime of apartheid was further defined in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. This statute defined apartheid as inhuman acts, similar to crimes against humanity "committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime" (Rome Statute of the International

Criminal Court). These inhumane acts encompass various human rights violations including torture, murder, forcible transfer, imprisonment, and persecution of an identifiable group on political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, or other grounds.

Many prominent thinkers, activists, and public officials have publicly stated that they believe the Israeli domination of Palestine constitutes crimes of apartheid. For example, in 2010, John Dugard, South African legal scholar and former International Court of Justice judge and Special Rapporteur to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and the International Law, described Israel's occupation of the West Bank as "an apartheid regime ... worse than the one that existed in South Africa" (Ben). In 2007 in an official report to the United Nations, Dugard wrote, "Can it seriously be denied that the purpose [...] is to establish and maintain domination by one racial group (Jews) over another racial group (Palestinians) and systematically oppressing them? Israel denies that this is its intention or purpose. But such an intention or purpose may be inferred from [its] actions" ("Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied since 1967").

### ***Stand With Us Responds to Allegations of Israeli Apartheid***

As these arguments enter the mainstream US political discourse, Stand With Us and other Zionist organizations have been eager to counter them. To do so, they have tried to frame Israel as a liberal democracy. Stand With Us has published on their website 88 ads, pamphlets, fliers, and signs about apartheid. Of these, 47 – more than half - reference women's rights and gay rights.

## Apartheid South Africa:

**Legally Enforced  
Segregation**



These signs, in public spaces all over South Africa, were a constant reminder of white legal domination and control over South Africa's black population.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 13** Page 3 of "Middle East Apartheid Today." This is an example of how Stand With presents South African Apartheid ("Middle East Apartheid Today" 3)

In "Middle East Apartheid Today," Stand With Us gives a selective description of apartheid that differs strikingly from the definition provided by international law. In this pamphlet, Stand with Us begins by presenting a description of the characteristics of South African Apartheid. Stand with Us gives a definition of apartheid that diverges strongly with the legal definition defined by international law. Stand with Us gives a much more lenient definition: "Apartheid ('separation') was the name for South Africa's legal system of segregation, discrimination, and domination based on race" (Stand With Us, "Middle East Apartheid Today" 2).

Stand with Us then describes the South African apartheid system as consisting of:

- Segregation, citing segregated buses and beaches (see figure 13) (Stand With Us, "Middle East Apartheid Today" 3)
- "Denial of "Civil and Social Rights," citing the passbook laws (Stand With Us, "Middle East Apartheid Today" 6).
- "Denial of political and civil rights" citing the right to vote (Stand With Us, "Middle East Apartheid Today" 7).
- The enforcement of "inequality through violent repression," citing police responses to anti-Apartheid activism (Stand With Us, "Middle East Apartheid Today" 8).

Stand with Us defines "Gender Apartheid" as "A system of legally sanctioned segregation and/or oppression based on gender" ("Middle East Apartheid Today" 10). Stand with Us also defines

Sexual Apartheid as “A system of legally and culturally enforced discrimination and/or persecution against people based on their sexual behaviors, with severe repression of sexual freedom” (“Middle East Apartheid Today” 16).

Through these descriptions, Stand with Us focuses attention on civil and political rights, while ignoring structural inequality that characterizes Apartheid systems. The segregation and civil rights violations in Apartheid South Africa described by Stand With Us formed part of the Apartheid system known as “petty apartheid.” Stand With Us neglects to describe the economic domination of black and colored South Africans that formed the larger context of South African society and drastically magnified the harm caused by segregation. This larger system was known as “grand apartheid.” Under the grand apartheid policy, the South African government controlled where in South Africa people of different races were allowed to live. Townships for black and colored South Africans were established on the edge of cities, creating poverty for black and colored people, while maintaining a readily available cheap labor pool for white South Africans to draw upon. Grand apartheid policies also created “homelands” called bantustans for black South Africans. Through a series of progressively more and more restrictive legislation, the South African government forced black people to relocate to small separate areas that the Apartheid government claimed were independent and self-governing. The bantustans did indeed have their own governmental structures, but those governments had little meaningful control over their communities. In 1970, with the passage of the Black Homeland Citizenship Act, all black people living in South Africa were stripped of their citizenship in South Africa and assigned citizenship in one of the 10 allegedly autonomous bantustans. Apartheid officials claimed that this granted black South Africans independence. In reality, it insured that Black



people were economically dependent on South Africa, while allowing white South Africans the illusion of a demographic majority within their country.

Ignoring South African's grand apartheid policies both allows Stand With Us to focus on civil rights and inclusion, but also deftly obstructs meaningful analysis of the similarities between Israel's occupation of Palestine and South African's grand apartheid policies. In fact, at the end of this pamphlet, Stand With Us argues that Israel's domination of Palestine is not apartheid:

Israel and the Palestinians do not have an apartheid relationship. Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are self-governing. The Palestinians have never been Israeli citizens and do not wish to be. They have their own national movement and formed their own government, the Palestinian Authority (PA), after signing the Oslo Accords with Israel in 1993. The PA has its own elections and legislative council and runs all aspects of civil society, from education to police forces, law courts, and health care. Unfortunately, the PA still uses many of the apartheid practices described in the booklet on their own people (Stand With Us, "Middle East Apartheid Today" 25).

While Palestine has nominal control over certain sections of the West Bank and over Gaza, this in fact makes it more similar to apartheid South Africa than different from it. Similar arguments were used to defend the bantustan policy. In his book One Country, Ali Abunimah, founder of the Electronic Intifada news website, cites former Apartheid South Africa President F.W. de Klerk as claiming that Israel's policies, as codified in the 2002 Road Map argument, were similar to grand apartheid policies. The Road Map argument was a peace agreement between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, brokered by the George W. Bush administration. In this plan, which was never implemented, Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon stipulated that a Palestinian state would be established on only 70% of the Gaza Strip and 42% of the West Bank. Like the bantustans in Apartheid South Africa, this Palestinian state would be divided into small, geographically separate areas, with Israel controlling all borders. Abunimah quotes de Klerk as saying "[What] apartheid originally wanted to achieve is what everybody now says is the

solution for Israel and Palestine – namely partitioning, separate nation states on the ethnicity, different cultures and different languages” (Abunimah 144). Through presenting South African Apartheid as solely civil and political rights problem, Stand With Us deflects attention away from Israel’s grand apartheid policies. It does the same when it discusses what it calls gender and sexual apartheid.

### ***The Limitations of Stand With Us Definitions of Apartheid***

When Stand With Us describes gender and sexual apartheid systems of segregation and oppression, it uses the term apartheid in a severely limited way. The specificity and profound injustice of an apartheid system cannot adequately be described as simply segregation and repression. These terms are also inaccurate because the crime of apartheid is defined under international law to be based on race specifically. Moreover, the terms gender apartheid and sexual apartheid create the impression that sexism and heterosexism are not grievous enough to warrant addressing, without the addition of “apartheid.” Moreover, by alleging that the Arab and Muslim countries in the Middle East are gender and sexual apartheid systems, Stand With Us presents sexism and heterosexism in the Middle East as unique phenomena that are incomparable to sexism and heterosexism within Israeli society or elsewhere.

The term gender apartheid also disguises the gendered effects of the South African Apartheid and other apartheid systems around the world. South African Apartheid affected men and women very differently and today, international law recognizes that women face gender-specific harm under apartheid systems. The Apartheid Convention includes a recognition that apartheid includes the “Deliberate imposition on a racial group or groups of living conditions calculated to cause its or their physical destruction in whole or in part” (“International Convention”). This language mirrors language used in Article Two of the United Nations Genocide Convention,

“acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group” from the Genocide Convention” (Schabas). This convention specifically recognizes that such genocidal acts may also include “imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group” (Schabas). The language indicates that crimes of apartheid do indeed include human rights violations that are gender-specific. The terminology used by Stand With Us, however, obscures the specific meaning of the term apartheid, while focusing attention on Arab culture by repeating images that have been developed by colonialism. The most striking of these images is of what Stand With Us calls honor killings.

### *Honor killings*

Stand With Us devotes most of its discussion of women’s rights and gay rights to the idea that women and queer/LGBT Arabs suffer from “honor killings.” Stand With Us defines honor killings as the “sanctioned murder of women.” Stand With Us writes, “When women are raped

In most Middle Eastern countries, no laws prevent anti-gay discrimination, and gays face severe ostracism. Though homosexuality is not illegal everywhere, gays are often arrested under laws against “lewd conduct” (Eavot) and experience police harassment and torture (Eavot and the Palestinian Authority). Recent reports indicate that murderers of gays may be prosecuted under the lenient category of “honor killings.”<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 14** Stand With Us describes honor killings of gay people (“Middle East Apartheid Today” 18)

or suspected of flirtations or sexual relations with men who are not their husbands, they are often murdered by relatives to preserve family ‘honor’” (“Middle East Apartheid Today” 12). Stand With Us frames violence against queer/LGBT Arabs and Muslims as another form of honor killings (see figure 14): “In most Middle Eastern countries, no laws prevent anti-gay discrimination, and gays face severe ostracism.

Though homosexuality is not illegal everywhere, gays

are often arrested under laws against ‘lewd conduct’ (Egypt) and experience police harassment and torture (Egypt and the Palestinian Authority). Recent reports indicate that murderers of gays may be prosecuted under the lenient category of ‘honor killings’” (“Middle East Apartheid Today” 18).

In both its description of honor killings of both women and queer/LGBT people, Stand With Us gives very little context. It’s not clear by whom this murder is sanctioned or which laws are lenient. The ambiguity allows the reader to assume that honor killings are sanctioned by Arab governments, by Islam, or by Arab culture in general. The result is the impression that honor killings are the product of Arab/Muslim culture. Nowhere does Stand With Us acknowledge that the existence of Christian Arab women or any other differences between women in the Middle East. In fact, Stand With Us uses Iran as an example, despite the fact that Iran is neither Arab nor considered by academics to be a part of the Middle East.



In contrast to the lack of specific information about national context, Stand With Us gives very specific information in its examples of honor killing. It describes two different examples of honor killings in Palestine. First, in the West Bank (see figure 15):

Figure 15 Example of Honor Killings of Women (Stand With Us, “Middle East Apartheid Today” 12)

Fifteen-year-old Rofayda Qaoud from the Palestinian village of Abu Qash was raped and impregnated by her brothers. When she refused to kill herself to save her family's honor, her mother Amira suffocated, stabbed, and beat her to death the night of January 23, 2003. She received a light sentence, as "honor killing" is a mitigating factor in the Palestinian judicial system ("Middle East Apartheid Today" 12)"

Then in Gaza (see figure 16):



**Figure 16 Photo accompanying an example of honor killings in Gaza (Stand With Us, "Middle East Apartheid Today" 13)**

In Gaza, a 27-year-old mother of five was bludgeoned to death with an iron chain. According to police in Gaza, her father, Jawdat al-Najar, heard his daughter Fadia, who had divorced in 2005, speaking on the phone with a man. He believed she was having a relationship with him. Police say al-Najar became enraged and beat her to death (Stand With Us, "Middle East Apartheid Today" 13).

Both of these example use lurid details, like incest, suffocation, and violent women, to sensationalize what were indeed horrific crimes. Stand With Us implies that this violence characterizes Palestinian society and then cites the murder of two Arab young women in the United States:

Sarah Said, 17, and her sister Amina, 18, were found dead in the back seat of a taxicab in Texas. The girls' great-aunt, Gail Gartrell, says the girls' Egyptian-born father killed them both because he felt they disgraced the family by dating non-Muslims and acting too Western, and she called the girls' murders an honor killing from the start (Stand With Us, "Middle East Apartheid Today" 15).

By including this example of honor killing in the United States, Stand With Us implies that this is an intrinsic part of Arab/Muslim culture, one that will travel with Arab/Muslim people when they immigrate.

### ***Death by Culture***

This concept of honor killings is rooted in colonial descriptions that have been analyzed by Arab feminists. The term honor killing is denounced by Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Suhad Daher-Nashif, two Palestinian women scholars and activists who work against violence against Palestinian women living inside Israel. In their article “The Politics of Killing Women in Colonized Contexts,” Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Daher-Nashif write that Palestinian feminists refuse to use the term “honor killing” instead proposing femicide,” or "qatl al-nisa" in Arabic. They argue that the term “honor killings” confers “honor” on murderers and abusers, but also that the category “honor crimes” functions to justify and cement the Israeli colonial domination of Palestine. (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Daher-Nashif).

Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Daher-Nashif write, “One reason we resist the use of “honor crime” is that every time a Palestinian female is killed, minutes after the murder and even before conducting any kind of investigation, the Israeli police and media announce it as based on “family honor.” The Israeli system’s use of this term becomes a tool to culturalize and dismiss the gravity of killing Palestinian women” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Daher-Nashif). By describing the murders of Palestinian women as caused by concepts of family honor, the Israeli government system claims that Palestinian culture is a hostile environment for women. Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Daher-Nashif call this explanation “culturalization” and they argue that this rhetoric is a deliberate colonial tactic.

Culture has been used to explain violence against women in other colonial contexts. Feminist scholar Uma Narayan describes how violence against women in India is explained through the category “dowry murder.” Just as “honor killings” are a culturally-specific explanation of violence against Arab/Muslim women, the concept of dowry murders is used to explain violence against Indian women by Westerners, for Western audiences. Dowry murders, Uma Narayan writes, is “a recent phenomenon of ‘burning a bride for insufficient dowry’” (Narayan 85). Narayan points out that little about violence against women is actually explained by this concept. Instead, Narayan writes that, “dowry murders were to a large degree unexplained even after this ‘explanation,’ remaining fairly mysterious and arbitrary practice that seemed to ‘happen’ to Indian women as a result of ‘Indian culture’” (Narayan 85). Narayan argues that when “such ‘cultural explanations’ are given for fatal forms of violence against Third-World women, the effect is to suggest that Third-World women suffer from ‘death by culture’” (Narayan 84). The category of honor killings also suggests that Arab women suffer from “death by culture.” Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Daher-Nashif write, “Culturalization not only lifts the responsibility from the criminal justice system to protect abused women, but also allows the Israeli system to position itself as superior, as belonging to a more “modern” and “advanced” culture” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Daher-Nashif). Through the category “honor killing” Stand With Us argues that Arab/Muslim culture harms women and LGBT people, thereby arguing that Israel deserves political support as a superior modern, democratic, culture.

Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Daher-Nashif write, “The police system does more than culturalize and orientalize; it inscribes its power over women’s living and dead bodies while playing the game of divide and rule” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Daher-Nashif). Palestinian feminists have resisted the category of honor killings, just as transnational feminists from other colonized context, like Uma

Narayan, have argued that cultural explanations for violence against women serve racist and colonial agendas. Nonetheless, as Narayan writes, concepts like honor killings and dowry murders are powerfully persuasive within the United States. Brand Israel draws on this persuasive power – established by a legacy of colonialism – when it describes violence against queer/LGBT Arabs and Muslims. By calling violence against queer/LGBT Arabs and Muslims honor killings, Stand With Us uses colonial rhetoric about women to frame its arguments about queer/LGBT people – knowing that this rhetoric is already a proven strategy for gaining support for colonial and military domination in the Middle East.

### *Veiling*



**Figure 17** Photo of veiled Palestinian women (Stand With Us, “Middle East Apartheid Today”<sup>9</sup>)

Through decrying violence against both women and queer/LGBT Arabs as honor killings, Stand With Us uses colonial rhetoric about Arab women to frame its arguments about LGBT Arabs. To conclude my analysis of the pamphlet “Middle East Apartheid Today,” I attend to the visual elements of the Stand With Us discourse.



In both its description of Arab women and queer/LGBT people, Stand With Us uses dramatic photographs that show women and queer/LGBT with covered faces (see figures 17 and 18). Through these photographs, Stand With Us draws on a fascination with the veiling of Muslim women that dates from the colonial era. Like colonial authorities who crusaded against the veil, such as Lord

**Figure 18** Photo of woman in a burqa ( Stand With Us “Middle East Apartheid Today”<sup>10</sup>)



Cromer, *Stand With Us* describes veiling as inherently oppressive. Next to a photograph of a woman wearing a burqa, *Stand With Us* writes, “Women in many Islamic countries are forced to cover their faces” (see figure 18) (“Middle East Apartheid Today” 10).

Likewise, in all of the photographs of queer/LGBT people used by *Stand With Us*, gay men are pictured with covered faces (see figure 19). These men are pictured either blindfolded or with their faces hidden or blurred. They are also shown as victims of violence – either as men facing execution or as corpses. In fact, in all of *Stand With Us* and *Blue Star*’s materials, there is only one picture of a queer/LGBT Arab person whose face is visible and not subjected to violence.

Through these photographs, *Stand With Us* depicts Arab women and queer/LGBT people as victims. They are largely anonymous, hidden, and mysterious and exotic. In brief: these photographs picture women and gay people as similarly “other.”



**Figure 19** *Stand With Us* pictures gay Iranians as corpses with covered faces (“Middle East Apartheid Today” 17).

Abu-Lughod has argued that images of veiled Muslim women are so ubiquitous in the Western world that veiled women come to symbolize this Middle East itself. She suggests that these images powerfully shape the limited and often racist ways that United State audiences understand the Middle East. She writes that these images “make it hard to think about the Muslim world without thinking about women, creating a

seemingly huge divide between "us" and "them" based on the treatment or positions of women. This prevents us from thinking about the connections between our various parts of the world, helping setting up a civilization divide" (Abu-Lughod, "The Muslim Woman"). Many colonial powers, throughout history, have employed discourse to create divisions between the civilized colonizers and the uncivilized colony. Brand Israel aims to make the same argument. By presenting photographs of queer/LGBT who are covered, it pictures them as anonymous victims, just like images of veiled women.

## **Conclusions**

Stand With Us and Blue Star use women's rights to frame their discussion of queer/LGBT rights. They accomplish this not only through discussing the two topics together and creating a similar visual vocabulary to describe both women and gay men, but also through using the term "honor killing" to describe violence against women and queer/LGBT people. By doing so, they draw on a legacy of using women's rights to justify colonialism and military intervention that date from colonial times. This framing deftly implies that military intervention, including the Israeli occupation, is justified to save Arab/Muslim women and queer/LGBT people.

The ads that I have described create the impression that Arab/Muslim women and queer/LGBT people need to be saved from their own cultures. Stand With Us and Blue Star have every reason to believe that this description will persuade United State audiences to support Israel over Palestine – because similar arguments about women have been persuasive to Western audiences since the Victorian era.

The implications of Brand Israel rhetoric about gay rights cannot be fully understood outside of this historical context provided by Arab feminist theorists. When the colonial roots of this

rhetoric are exposed, it is easy to understand how, as Palestinian Queers for BDS has argued, Brand Israel rhetoric is not about gay rights.

## Chapter Three

### Urban Landscapes, Violent Queers: Transgender Perspectives on Brand Israel Discourses

#### Introduction

Why do Brand Israel ads feature cities and urban spaces? What is the significance of Brand Israel materials that claim that gay Palestinians are responsible for suicide bombings? In this chapter, I answer these questions through the lens of transgender theories. In the first chapter of this thesis, I use Arab feminist theory to analyze the Brand Israel materials produced by Blue Star and Stand With Us, two prominent producers of Brand Israel materials. Through the lens of Arab feminism, it is possible to place Brand Israel rhetoric in a historical context of similar orientalist discourses about Arab women. By developing this context, I have illuminated the colonial roots of Brand Israel rhetoric and discussed how these discourses continue to be recast to support both contemporary US military intervention in the Middle and to support Israel. In this chapter, I use gender and transgender theory to further expose how Brand Israel rhetoric draws upon colonial discourses. First, I examine the framework developed by Joey Mogul, Andrea Ritchie, and Kay Whitlock and other theorists who focus on the intersection of gender, race, and sexuality in colonial contexts. I utilize this framework to analyze Brand Israel materials that invoke the trope of the “Palestinian Gay Suicide Bomber.” I argue that this example reveals profound racism implicit within Brand Israel rhetoric and larger homonationalist arguments for gay rights. Then, in the second half of this chapter, I use theories developed by Judith Jack Halberstam to analyze the prominence of urban images within Brand Israel ads. I argue that Brand Israel rhetoric constructs the visibility of LGBT subjects as the primary mark of gay liberation, which in turn functions to obscure the voices of queer/LGBT Palestinians. Through this analysis, I hope to show how Brand Israel rhetoric constructs queer/LGBT

Palestinians as “impossible subjects” or as hopelessly violent and sexually perverted. Brand Israel discourses promise civil rights for gay Israelis explicitly at the expense of Palestinians, but queer/LGBT Palestinians are challenging these power relations through refusing the politics of visibility and embracing a queer liberation agenda that centers the intersections between race, gender, and sexuality.

### **Transgender Perspectives on Colonial History**

Brand Israel discourses arise from and are persuasive because of colonial history. In this section, I will present Joey Mogul, Andrea Ritchie, and Kay Whitlock’s analysis of the connections between gender, sexuality, and race in US history and how this discourse continues to shape us by demonizing queer people, especially gender non-conforming queer people of color as criminally deviant. By describing this history, I hope to demonstrate the source of the persuasive power of Brand Israel rhetoric to US audiences. Then, I will use this theoretical framework to examine the connections between race, gender, and sexuality in Brand Israel materials, first by examining the colonial history of Palestine and then by discussing the archetype of the “Palestinian gay suicide bomber.”

### ***Race, Gender, and Sexuality: A Transgender Theoretical Analysis of US Colonial History***

“From the first point of contact with European colonizers,” write Joey Mogul, Andrea Ritchie, and Kay Whitlock,” – long before the modern lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer identities were formed and vilified – indigenous peoples, enslaved Africans, and immigrants, particularly immigrants of color, were systematically policed and punished based on actual and projected ‘deviant’ sexualities and gender expressions, as an integral part of colonization, genocide, and enslavement” (Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 1). Mogul et al. present the 1531

expedition of Spanish conquistador Vasco Nunez de Balboa as one of the first points of contact between European colonizers and the indigenous people they would come to see as ‘deviant’ and ‘sinful.’ According to Scott Morgensen, While traveling through what is now known as Panama, Balboa encountered the Quaraca indigenous people. Balboa and the Spanish soldiers accompanying him slaughtered the Quaraca people “as animals” or “hewed ...in pieces as the butchers doo fleshe.” (Morgensen 39). Then Balboa entered the king’s house and found the king’s brother and other men dressed in women’s apparel or living with each other in sexual relationships. Upon this discovery, Balboa threw forty of these Quaraca people to his dogs to be eaten alive (Morgensen 39).

Mogul et al. draw attention to Balboa’s violence against the Quaraca not only because of its profound brutality, but because of the way violence of this kind helped to establish colonial hierarchies that were gendered, sexualized and raced. Balboa’s massacre was the first recorded Spanish punishment for sodomy and indigenous gender ‘deviance,’ but it was certainly not the last (Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 1). According to Mogul et al., “ anti-sodomitical zeal frequently served as a justification for sexualized violence used to seize Indigenous lands and eradicate or expel its inhabitants” (Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 3).

Beginning in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, European religious authorities- essential partners in the colonization the Americas and direct participants in violence against indigenous Americans— advanced the idea that Natives were “polluted with sexual sin” (Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 2). In 1525, when Indigenous youth revolted against his attempts to convert them, a missionary described Caribs as “sodomites more than any other race” (Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 3). Many other religious and colonial authorities described the indigenous people of the Americas in

similar language that invoked both race and sexuality, indicating that they understood sexual perversion to be an intrinsic characteristic of the people they conquered.

Missionaries and other colonialists gave accounts of Indigenous people they understood as “men” who took on the roles and appearance of “women” and vice versa. These people were often singled out for violent punishments. Europeans described Indigenous people whom they understood as men living as women as servile, degraded and weak. Likewise, they saw the sexuality of native people as a failure of masculinity (Morgensen 40). In contrast, European masculinity was valorized as strong and morally upright. This argument made the successful conquest of the Americas seem to be morally necessary and morally justified. In fact, this understanding of European masculinity was constructed in opposition to Native sexuality and gender. Mogul et al. write, that, “Although Indigenous societies are widely reported to have allowed for a range of gender identities and expressions, colonization required the violent suppression of gender fluidity in order to facilitate the establishment of hierarchal relations between two rigidly defined genders, and by extension, between the colonizer and the colonized (Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 3).”

From the beginnings of the European colonization of the Americas, the policing of sex and gender played a role in the establishment and maintenance of European dominance. From this foundation, these ideas continue to echo throughout history to criminalizing people of color today in the United States. When the transatlantic slave travel began, Europeans justified slavery by claiming that Africans were also sexually deviants. Africans were cast hypersexual predators and a threat to white people. Through the “jezebel” figure, Black women were cast as, in the words of Patricia Hill Collins, “the freak on the border demarking heterosexuality from homosexuality” (Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 6). Siobhan Somerville notes that researchers

who practiced scientific racism often sought find physical evidence of perverted sexuality on the bodies of Black people. Somerville cites medical texts that claimed that lesbians have enlarged clitorises and that “this is particularity is more so in colored women” (Somerville 4). Somerville emphasizes that US discourses about sexuality were formed through racism: “The formation of notions of heterosexuality and homosexuality emerged in the United States through (and not merely in parallel to) a discourse saturated with assumptions about the racialization of bodies. These assumptions and the heightened surveillance of bodies in a racially segregated culture demanded a specific kind of logic, which, I will argue, gave coherence to the new concepts of homo- and heterosexuality” (Somerville 4).

Like Native Americans and Africans, many immigrants in turn were also pathologized as sexually deviant. These immigrants were cast as bringing sexual pollution to American shores, thereby justifying their exclusion and repression. This is of particular relevance to understanding the context in which contemporary Americans see Arab and Muslims. In fact, Mogul et al. argue the notion of homosexuality as a foreign threat relates to ideas developed by Crusaders and Europeans concerned with “Moorish” invaders (Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 8).

### ***Queer Criminal Archetypes***

The history that Mogul et al. outline shows that by casting indigenous people as sexual perverts and gender deviants, Europeans justified their conquest of the Americas as a moral necessity. Policing gender and sexual expression became a part of maintaining systems of racial domination because, in fact, racial, gender, and sexual categories were constructed through and in relation to each other. Mogul writes, “the gendered and sexualized policing and punishment of Native people by European colonizers served as a foundation for laws, cultural norms, and



practices that have criminalized people of color deemed sexually and gender deviant” (Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 6). Mogul argues that these discourses now take the form of queer criminal archetypes which can be found in popular culture and are invoked by police, lawyers, judges, prison officials, and politicians to justify the criminal prosecution of people perceived as queer, particularly people of color. These archetypes include the following:

- ***The gleeful queer killer:*** This archetype describes queers as people who kill for erotic pleasure or as a way of coping with emotional turmoil. Often the targets of the queer killers are lovers, sexual enemies, and anyone who stands the way of their perverted

desires (Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 27). Mogul cites as examples of this archetype including the case of Leopold and Loeb and the “transsexual” serial kill James “Buffalo Bill” Gumb in the movie “Silence of the Lambs” (see figure 20)



Figure 20 The character James "Buffalo Bill" Gumb, serial killer in the movie Silence of the Lambs. Gumb is presented as gender transgressive predator who murders women (Hess).

(Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 29).

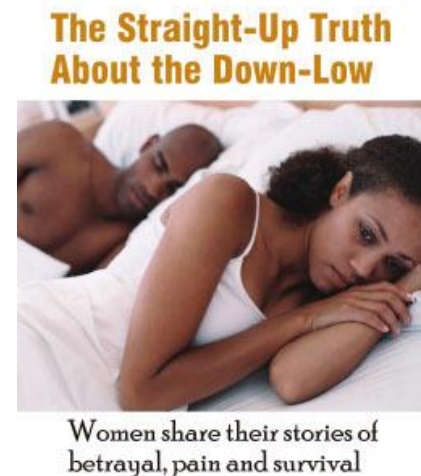
- ***The sexually degraded predator:*** The gay recruiter, the sexually aggressive butch and/or Black lesbian, the male or transgender child molester, the prison rapist, and the deceptive transsexual are all examples of this archetype (Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 31). This archetype constructs queer people as morally depraved and sexually aggressive.

Violence and criminal prosecution against queer people is therefore cast as necessary to

protect children and families – as well as the racial and economic order (Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 34).

- ***Disease spreaders:*** This archetype constructs queer people as promiscuous spreaders of disease. One example of this archetype is the belief that the rapacious sexuality of gay men was responsible for the AIDS crisis. Black men have been especially vilified as spreaders of disease through the image of deceptive Black gay men on “the down low,” who appear straight and masculine and thus infect unknowing straight women (see figure 21).

- ***The queer security threat:*** This archetype describes queer people as a danger to the family, the community, and the nation (Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 36). Arab and Muslims have been maligned under this archetype. For example, Huda Jaddallah has written about her experience of being mistaken for a man when she enters a women’s restroom and then being treated as a potential terrorist based on her ethnicity and her “disguise” (Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 66).



**Joy Marie**

**Figure 21** The cover of *The Straight-Up Truth About the Down-Low* by Joy Marie. This book presents a picture of black men as dishonest disease spreaders. In the description, Marie writes, “You’re finally living the American dream—the perfect family—but one day you wake up and realize that your Prince Charming is really a lying Queen” (Marie).



**Figure 22** A screen shot from a Memphis, Tennessee TV news report that described "vicious high school lesbian gangs" in 2007 (Americans for Truth about Homosexuality).

- *Young queer intruders:* This archetype depicts young people of color as violent intruders. Drawing on discourses about Black and Latinos as hypersexual and aggressive, this archetype speaks of ‘vicious Lesbian gangs,’ ‘thugs’ and ‘criminals.’ It is invoked to configure the very presence of young queer people of color as a threat that justifies criminal prosecution (Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 41). (For an example of this archetype, see figure 22.)

Mogul et. al argue that these criminal archetypes hold profound cultural sway today. “By painting all queers as ultimately infected with the same violent, sexually degraded, and pathological tendencies,” Mogul writes, “the archetypes reinforce the concept that queers are inherently unworthy of citizenship, parenting, protection against discrimination, and even the right to live in our communities.” (Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 91). These criminal archetypes recast colonial discourses and function to support white heteropatriarchy and maintain the contemporary racial, sexual, and gender status quo.

The history and the discourses that I have outlined have tremendous implications for the analysis of Brand Israel discourses for two reasons. First, because Brand Israel was developed as marketing technique aimed to appeal to US audience, this history is significant because it shapes the context into which Brand Israel discourses enter. The persuasive power of Brand Israel rhetoric lies, in part, in the fact that US audiences are already intimately familiar with the discourses on which Brand Israel rhetoric draws. Second, the analysis of US colonial history developed by Joey Mogul et al. can be used as framework for understanding the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality within Israeli settler colonialism. In the next section of this paper, I will present a brief history of Israeli settler-colonialism, inspired by the work of Mogul et al. Through this history, I will describe how gender, sexuality, and race are constructed together in the Palestinian colonial context.

### *Connections between Gender, Sexuality, and Race in Israeli Settler-Colonialism*

In 1798, Napoleon justified his invasion of Egypt by arguing that the country had been driven into barbarism by the occupying Turks. Therefore, Napoleon claimed that the French had a moral duty to liberate the country – an argument that echoes the assertions of European missionaries to the Americans (Massad 3). European Orientalists and military authorities who traveled to the Middle East described Arabs and Muslims in sexualized and gendered language. In fact, the sexual and gender practices of Arab people figured prominently in their accounts (Massad 9). They described Arabs and Muslims as degenerate, ‘decadent’ and hedonistic (i.e. hypersexual), and sexually exotic, thereby casting the Middle East as a place where Westerners could find sexual experiences unavailable in Europe. Arab and Muslim men were described as effeminate and thereby available for conquest. Palestinian scholar Edward Said wrote, “Along with other people variously designated as backward, degenerate, uncivilized, and retarded, the

Orientalists were viewed in a framework constructed out of biological determinism and moral-political admonishment. The Oriental was thus linked to elements in Western society (delinquents, the insane, women, the poor) who have a common identity best described as lamentably alien” (Massad 11). Palestinian scholar Joseph Massad quips, “Said could have easily added the sexual deviant to this list” (Massad 11).

When European and Russian Jewish settlers arrived in Palestine intending to establish a permanent presence, they did so in the context of the colonial rhetoric that I have described. Political Zionist ideology produced a concept of ideal masculinity that was directly connected to military might and immigration to Palestine. This ideal Jew was muscular, lived on a rural kibbutz, and was ready and able to defend himself and his community (Boyarin 110). In contrast, early Zionists understood Palestine as ‘virgin lands to be penetrated.’ According to some scholars, the act of settling the land of Israel was sometimes configured as the sexual domination of passive, feminized queer Arab men (Kuntsman 145). In this way, colonial discourses about race, gender, and sexuality were reconfigured and used to support Zionist settler-colonialism. In the section of this chapter I will use this theoretical framework to analyze the trope of the “Palestinian Gay Suicide Bomber.”

### **Deceptive and Degenerate by Nature: A Transgender Theoretical Analysis of the “Palestinian Gay Suicide Bomber”**

The construction of Palestinian queer people, usually gay men, as suicide bombers is one of the most striking and disturbing narratives in Brand Israel discourses. Through Mogel’s theory about the colonial roots of the criminalization of queer people, I analyze Brand Israel discourses

about the Palestinian “gay suicide bomber” in order to uncover the racial, gendered, and sexual dimensions of these discourses.

“Terrorist groups pressure gay Palestinians into becoming suicide bombers to ‘purge their moral guilt,’” writes Stand with Us in its flier “Treatment of Gay Men by the Palestinian Authority,” (See figure 23) (“Treatment of Gay Men by Palestinian Authority”). Stand With Us repeats this claim in two more booklets. The trope of Palestinian gay suicide bomber is also the theme of Israeli director Eytan Fox’s film “The Bubble.”

## Treatment of Gay Men by the Palestinian Authority



- Palestinian Authority Police arrest and torture gay men.
- Palestinian families organize vigilante mobs to beat and kill gay men.
- Palestinians accuse gay Palestinians of collaborating with Israel.
- Terrorist groups pressure gay Palestinians into becoming suicide bombers to “purge their moral guilt.”

### KNOW THE FACTS

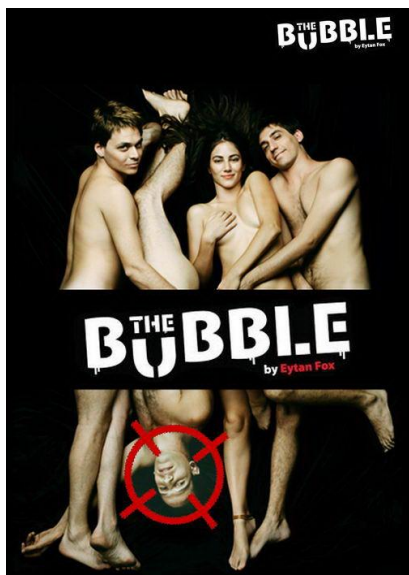
standwithus.com

### *Palestinian Gay Suicide Bombers in “The Bubble”*

Figure 23 (Stand With Us. “Treatment of Gay Men by Palestinian Authority”).

Films by Eytan Fox, the director of the movie “Yossi,” which I described in the introduction of my thesis, are frequently used in Brand Israel events sponsored by the Israeli government. In “The Bubble,” Fox describes the unlikely and ultimately doomed romance between Noam, an Israeli from Tel Aviv, and Ashraf, a Palestinian from Nablus. Fox’s film has been described as a Romeo and Juliet story in which Ashraf and Noam are tragically doomed from the beginning. This sense of doomed romance is created even in advertisements for the film who pictured Ashraf as a naked corpse with a target over his face (see figure 24). This description lends itself to the interpretation that, despite the best efforts of Israelis, personal relationships between Palestinians and Israelis are doomed to a violent end.





**Figure 24** Official advertisement for "The Bubble" Ashraf, the Palestinian character, is pictured with a target on his face. Unlike the other characters who are in sexualized poses, he looks like a corpse. This image shows Ashraf as profoundly different from the character and his death as pre-determined ("The Bubble")

Ashraf and Noam meet in the film's first scene while Noam is on military duty at a checkpoint in the West Bank. Ashraf and Noam lock eyes for a brief moment when Ashraf is forced to raise his shirt to prove that he is not carrying a bomb (Stein 2). Through this encounter, Ashraf is immediately framed as a potential terrorist, whose very body can legitimately be examined for evidence of violent intentions.

Ashraf initiates a romance with Noam, which takes place in Tel Aviv and is conducted in Hebrew. Much of the movie focuses on Ashraf's tenuous position in Noam's Tel Aviv social circle.

Ashraf endeavors to pass as a Jewish Israeli to keep a job as a waiter. He is presented as an interloper in Noam's Tel Aviv safe, queer "bubble" – and one who is willing to be dishonest and break laws in order to stay. Ashraf is an outsider – and ultimately a threat (see figure 25 for examples of how the otherness of Ashraf is presented visually).



**Figure 24** Promotional photographs for the film "The Bubble." Ashraf, in the foreground of the large photo, is pictured as separate from the happy Israelis in the background (Critikat). This advertisement underscores the idea of Ashraf as an outsider and a potential threat.

When Ashraf's sister is killed by an Israeli soldier, Ashraf seeks violent retribution. In the film's dramatic ending, he and Noam are the sole victims of the bomb that Ashraf has smuggled into Tel Aviv on his body (Stein 10). Ashraf's body is positioned as central to Fox's story, from the beginning when his body is bared to prove that he is not a terrorist, to the end when a bomb is strapped to his torso.

Using the framework of Joey Mogul et al., it is easy to understand how "The Bubble" is likely to be interpreted by the US audiences targeted by Brand Israel campaigns. Fox's narrative about Ashraf is similar to the queer criminal archetypes identified by Mogul. Ashraf can be read as a "gleeful



**Figure 26** A screenshot from the trailer for "The Bubble." Noam's roommate (left) jokingly asks Noam if he will be dating more Palestinian men, referring to them as "sexy suicide bombers" ("The Bubble - US Trailer").

queer killer" whose emotional trauma reveals a latent violence that is directed at his lover. He is also an example of a "queer security threat," whose very homosexuality provides the cause and the opportunity for terrorist violence. This is further evidenced by the fact that one of Noam's roommates refers to gay Palestinians as "sexy suicide bombers" (see figure 26). Because this story draws on archetypes that are already pervasive in the United States, the storyline is believable and credible in a way it might not be otherwise. The idea that a person would respond to a family member's death by murdering himself and his partner is not immediately believable. But when that person is a queer Arab man, pre-existing images of queer Arabs as perverted,



unhinged, violent, and a threat to national security can make that story seem very believable indeed.<sup>4</sup>

### ***The Context of “The Bubble”: Israeli Discourses about Race, Gender, and Sexuality***

Because “The Bubble” features an interracial queer romance, it is difficult to ignore the profound racism of the queer criminal archetypes it echoes. Eytan Fox presents Noam, a white Jewish Israeli, as a noble, if tragically misguided figure. Noam’s homosexuality is to be celebrated, while Ashraf’s race, in contrast, makes his homosexuality perverted. This racism becomes further visible by analyzing examples of the Palestinian gay suicide bomber trope in Israeli LGBT culture. In Adi Kuntsman’s article “The Soldier and the Terrorist: Sexy Violence and Queer Nationalism,” he cites examples of the Palestinian gay suicide bomber trope from the message boards of Gayru.net, a website utilized mainly by Russian, Jewish, gay immigrants to Israel. Kunstman discusses a dialogue on Gayru.net about a news article about Palestinian gay men who experienced homophobia in the West Bank and Gaza and chose to escape to Israel, only to find themselves facing deportation. Kunstman quotes Gayru.net user Serano who wrote, “If they [Palestinian gays] were not caught ‘in action’, some of them would have been *shahids*<sup>5</sup> or Hamas<sup>6</sup> members” (Kunstman 150). When another user questions the connection between sexuality and terrorism, a user with the screen name Pavel responds, “the two cannot *not* be connected” (Kuntsman 151). Pavel goes on to write, “And what if he pretends to be gay? And what if his family or his lover in Gaza or Nablus is caught and he is ‘offered’ to ransom [them] in

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<sup>4</sup> I argue that Fox’s depiction of Ashraf draws on colonial images of Arab men as sexually perverted, passive, decadent, and effeminate. The characterization of Arab manhood is not, however, the only image circulating in US culture. Arab men are also regularly described as hyper-masculine, such as images of Arab men as abusers of women. However, I believe that images of effeminate Arab men are more useful to understanding Fox’s film “The Bubble.” “The Bubble” and other Brand Israel materials picture hyper-masculine, muscular Israeli gay men. The character of Ashraf differs strikingly than these men because he is depicted as quiet and passive.

<sup>5</sup> Shahid, or شهيد, is the Arabic word for martyr. It can be used to refer to suicide bombers.

<sup>6</sup> Hamas is a Palestinian political party that has claimed responsibility for several suicide bombings.

blood (mainly ours)?” Another user responds, “What Pavel says makes sense...it is a well known fact that there were several women-shahids who decided to become suicide bombers in order to save the family’s honour, for example, in the case of adultery or out-of-wedlock birth etc. It is very possible that a Palestinian gay ‘caught in action’ could do the same” (Kunstman 151).

Kunstman points out that these users evoke two different scenarios that Palestinian men might come to Israel: First, they argue that Palestinian men are terrorists because they are gay. In this narrative, the assumed homophobia of Palestinian society forces gay Palestinians into becoming terrorists, thereby configuring Palestinian culture as fundamentally threatening to Israelis. In the second scenario, Palestinian men are terrorists-rather-than-gay, who exploit Israeli good will and liberal values. This scenario recasts Israeli narratives about Palestinian terrorists who claims to be laborers seeking jobs inside Israel or sick people seeking medical care. This valorizes Israelis as morally superior to Palestinians, but cautions that liberalism is a weakness that Palestinians will seek to exploit. Thus, the claim of Brand Israel to advocate for gay rights should be understood as profoundly limited. In Brand Israel discourses, Israelis are worthy of gay rights. Extending those rights to Palestinians is seen as potentially dangerous.

Theorist Jasbir Puar describes the way that liberal politics incorporate certain queer subjects into the nation-state without disrupting racial, class, gender and national ideologies and power relations. Puar argues that the inclusion of queer subjects into the US nation-state depends specifically on distinguishing "properly homo" subjects from orientalized “terrorist” bodies. This dynamic is apparent in the way that the normativity of the character of Noam is dependent on Ashraf’s racial inferiority. It is also in evidence when Israeli gay soldiers are presented as symbols of liberation in Brand Israel ads. This discourse is also found when Israeli soldiers are



**Figure 27** An example of Kobi Israel's homoerotic photography of Israeli soldiers in uniform (Out.com Editors)

presented gay sex symbols, as in Eytan Fox's films "Yossi and Jagger" and "Yossi," and Kobi Israel's homoerotic photographs of Israeli men in military uniforms (see figure 27). Puar points out that the inclusion of some gay people is dependent on the exclusion of others,

but she roots her analysis in the

political and cultural landscape of the post September 11<sup>th</sup> United States. She contends that the ideas of homonationalism have global resonance, calling homonationalism "reflective of a neo-liberal phenomenon happening in many, many national locations ("Citation and Censorship" 141). By putting Puar's ideas in dialogue with Mogul's insights about the colonial roots of queer criminal archetypes, I believe that my analysis puts Puar's thinking into a broader historical context that better highlights the intersection of gender, sexuality, and race within these discourses.

In his analysis of Gayru.net, Kunstman writes that Palestinians, "are tellingly absent in narrations of Israel as place, country and society; and if/when mentioned they usually figure as terrorists.

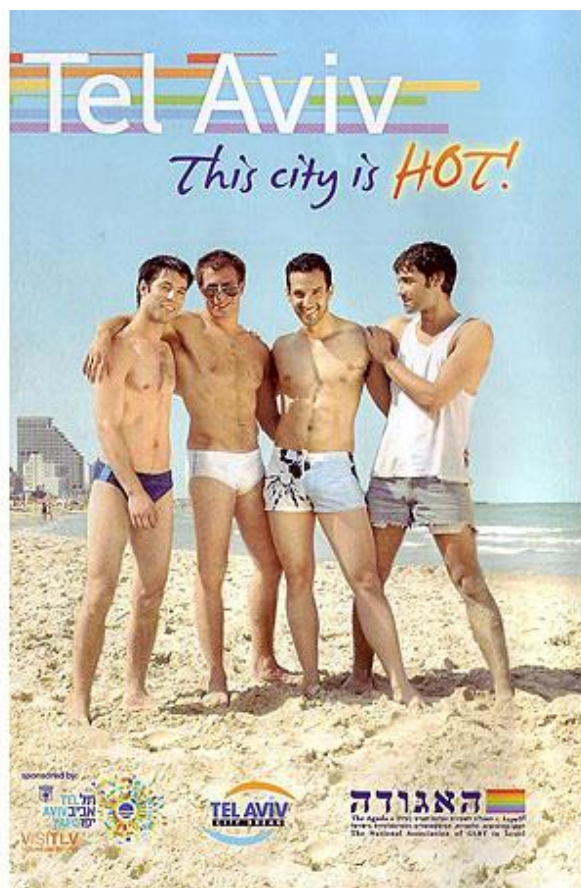
In some of the discussions they are also depicted as patriarchal, heteronormative and homophobic. Heterosexualizing Palestinians and queering Israel work in tandem to mark 'Palestinian gays' as impossible subjects" (Kunstman 151). In Brand Israel discourses, queer/LGBT Palestinians are presented only as victims who need to be saved by enlightened,

modern Israelis (see figure 32 for one example of this characterization) or as sexually perverted terrorists who threaten Israel's security. In next section of this chapter, I will discuss how Brand Israel further constructs gay Palestinians as impossible subjects through narratives about urban identity and modernism.

### **Urban Israel: A Transgender Theoretical Analysis of the Politics of Visibility in Brand Israel Discourses**

Brand Israel discourses operate, in part, by obscuring the voices of queer/LGBT Palestinians. Brand Israel presents a landscape of pride parades and Israeli urban life where Palestinians are noticeably missing. By using Judith Jack Halberstam's analysis of urban-centric queer discourses, I will demonstrate how Brand Israel constructs a discourse in which the lives of queer/LGBT Palestinians are unintelligible.

In the previous chapter of my thesis, I analyzed the gay identity related materials produced by Stand With Us and Blue Star. Many of these ads tout gay pride celebrations as evidence of the liberation of Israeli gay people and assure LGBT travelers that they can be "out" and open about their sexuality while traveling in Israel. These materials create a discourse that treats the ability of individuals to be visible as LGBT subjects as one of the most important signs of sexual and gender liberation. Urban landscapes feature prominently in these advertisements. Of the ads that mention or depict a location, all of the locations presented in Stand with Us and Blue Star's advertisements are urban except one (for examples see figures 29-31). Brand Israel rhetoric describes Israel as urban and a place where gay people can experience freedom through being open about their sexuality.



**Figure 33** An example of a government sponsored ad for gay tourism to Tel Aviv (Schulman)

Brand Israel's emphasis on urban images of Israel is also evident in its portrayal of Tel Aviv a gay center, similar to San Francisco (Blue Star, "Tel Aviv- The Bubble). Brand Israel markers decided in 2008 to begin focusing their attention on gay tourism to Tel Aviv (Hod). In marketing materials, they describe Tel Aviv as a place where travelers can be open about their sexuality (see figure 32 for an example of such an ad). Government officials have claimed that Tel Aviv's urban status is central to its appeal to gay people. Brand Israel markers

decided in 2008 to begin focusing their

attention on gay tourism to Tel Aviv (Hod). In marketing materials, they describe Tel Aviv as a place where travelers can be open about their sexuality (see figure 32 for an example of such an ad). Government officials have claimed that Tel Aviv's urban status is central to its appeal to gay people. Yaniv Weizman, a Tel Aviv city council member said Tel Aviv is a ripe to be marketed to gay people because, "the gay tourist likes urban vacations, he forms attachments with the community in the cities he visits, enjoys partying and usually returns to places he had a good time in. This is established tourism which draws in young tourism and sets trends which other sectors of the population adopt" (Schulman). According to Israeli journalist Cnaan Liphshiz, who reported on a Stand With Us gay delegation to Tel Aviv, "Tel Aviv's burgeoning





Figure 29 Blue Star poster picturing a pride event in urban Jerusalem ("Blue Star PR Fem/Pinkwashing Posters")



Figure 30 Stand With Us photograph of a pride parade in an urban setting ("Diversity" 9)



Figure 31 A screenshot from the video "Gay Oasis" by Blue Star. This short video discusses Tel Aviv as an urban refuge for gays and lesbians. This screen shot shows the urban setting pictured in the film ("Gay Oasis")

## Why does Israel look like paradise to gay Palestinians?



Israel is a sanctuary to many gay Palestinians, who suffered beatings, imprisonment, and death at the hands of their families and the Palestinian Authority police within Palestinian communities.

Israel has no laws against sodomy, and its constitution guarantees equal rights. Gay and lesbian Israelis

- have gay organizations and community centers
- hold gay pride parades
- gay members of parliament
- serve openly in the military
- enjoy tv programs with gay themes

**Israel respects life.**

Source: Paul Varrell Chicago Free Press, Aug. 28, 2002

**standwithus.com**

**Figure 32 Another Stand With Us flyer picturing an urban pride parade (“Why Does Israel look like Paradise for Gay Palestinians?”)**

gay scene may be the single most effective Israel-advocacy instrument in the Zionist toolbox” (Liphshiz)

In contrast, Brand Israel ads paint a picture of Palestine as a place that LGBT/queer people, including LGBT/queer Palestinians, should leave if they care about their own safety. Brand Israel discourses claim that no queer/LGBT Palestinian would want to stay in Palestine. This is accomplished with ads with text like, *“Why does Israel look like paradise to gay Palestinians?”* pictured in figure 32 (Stand With Us, “Why Does Israel Look Like Paradise to Gay Palestinians”) and arguments like “Palestinian Authority police arrest and torture gay men. Palestinian families organize vigilante mobs to beat and kill gay men” (Stand With Us, “Treatment of Gay Palestinians”). In this discourse, no rational gay Palestinian would choose to stay in Palestine. Queer/LGBT Palestinians who do stay are cast, therefore, as irrational, pre-modern, or otherwise suspect.

When Brand Israel materials construct Palestine as a place where no queer people would want to stay, they echo the attitude towards the rural US that Halberstam describes in her discussion of the murder of transgender young man Brandon Teena. Halberstam analyzes the fascination with Brandon Teena within and outside US queer and LGBT communities. Halberstam writes that the rural location of Brandon Teena’s murder figured prominently in understandings of his death. Many commentators questioned why Brandon Teena would choose to live in a rural area. Some dismissed his death as

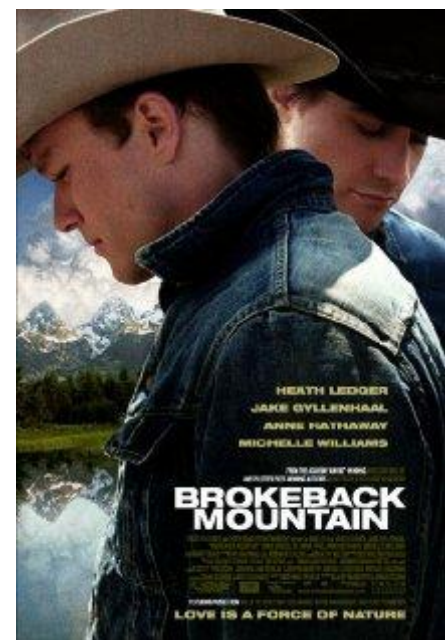


Figure 33 Official advertisement for the movie "Brokeback Mountain," which depicts the rural United States as a hostile environment for gay people ("IMDb")



the natural consequence of choosing to live in such a dangerous place (Halberstam 33). Both because of his transgender status and because of his decision to move to a small town in rural Nebraska, Brandon was portrayed by many commentators as suspect. In this telling of the story of Brandon, he is pictured as taking advantage of the young women he dated or as profoundly foolhardy. That a queer person would choose to stay in or, in the case of Brandon, move to a rural area is cast as suspicious.

The resonance of these discourses about queer identities within US culture is evident in the academy award-winning movie “Brokeback Mountain.” This film follows the secret romance between Ennis Delmar and Jack Twist, two hyper-masculine cowboys living in rural Wyoming (see figure 33 for an example of an advertisement for the film). The movie presents rural America as hostile to their love, through giving examples of homophobic violence in Ennis’ hometown. As the story unfolds, a conflict develops between Ennis and Jack over the visibility of their relationship. Jack argues that they should be less secretive. Ennis, who is reluctant to do so, is presented as cowardly and as a failed queer subject who is held back from love by his desire to keep his feelings private. In the conclusion of the movie, Jack dies. The cause of death is left ambiguous, but it is heavily implied that he was the victim of homophobic violence. “Brokeback Mountain” presents rural areas as deadly to queer people and queer people who stay in them as regressive. “Brokeback Mountain” was praised as a positive representation of the queer community, without little discussion of the anti-rural images in the film. This reception is further evidence of the power of anti-rural discourses in the United States.

Brand Israel presents Palestine as similar to the rural US – an unsafe location for queer people. That there is such a clear parallel attitude within US LGBT communities helps to explain why Brand Israel rhetoric is persuasive and from which cultural roots that persuasive power is

generated. By claiming that no Palestinian would want to stay in Palestine, Brand Israel discourses function to mask the existence of Palestinian queer/LGBT communities. This echoes the invisibility of LGBT people within the rural US that Halberstam discusses in relation to Brandon Teena and echoed in “Brokeback Mountain.” Halberstam notes that in the urban queer imagination, the opportunity for “visibility” marked by “coming out” is taken as a measure of freedom and progress (Halberstam 36). This viewpoint assumes that a queer person who chooses to stay in a rural area is choosing an anachronistic form of queer identity marked by repression and the closet – a characterization of that has much in common with Western descriptions of non-Western queer/LGBT practices and identities.

Through constructing liberated gayness as an urban, modern phenomenon, Brand Israel discourses construct an understanding of Palestine, like the rural United States, as a place that is pre-modern. This powerfully echoes orientalist discourses as described by scholars like Edward Said and Leila Ahmed. This narrative, as I have already discussed, describes Arab culture with words like ancient, traditional, exotic, mysterious, veiled, closed, backward, and regressive. Palestinian queer/LGBT people who choose to stay in Palestine are therefore constructed as “impossible subjects” or as irrational, foolhardy, suspect, and regressive – much like understandings of Brandon Teena as described by Halberstam. Therefore, Brand Israel rhetoric constructs queer visibility as a marker of liberation and establishes Western sexual and gender categories as modern and progressive. Palestinians queer/LGBT people and their stories and understandings of themselves cannot be understood in this framework. Brand Israel rhetoric establishes the coherence of Israeli queer/LGBT identities at the expense of Palestinians and is profoundly racist. This discourse, of course is not unique to Brand Israel rhetoric. In fact, it is invoked by mainstream, US gay rights movements which seek to gain gay rights without

challenging the racism implicit in the queer criminal archetypes described by Joey Mogul et al. As Roderick Ferguson writes in his article “Race-ing Homonormativity: Citizenship, Sociology, and Gay Identity,” “Presuming that homosexuality is the same in all people opens it up to white racial formation. As homonormative formations cite homosexuality as a category of equivalence, they work to regulate differences of race, gender, and class – differences that disrupt the coherence of homonormativity as identity politics” (Ferguson 63).

In fact, discourses that describe urban areas as havens for queer/LGBT people ignore how race shapes the experiences of queer/LGBT people. Cities can be a site of hyper-visibility for queer/LGBT people of color who sometimes experience greater surveillance and policing in urban areas than in rural locations. Cities also can be places of invisibility and anonymity, where people find themselves separated from family and other sources of stability.

Halberstam writes, “In reality, many queers from rural or small towns move to the city out of necessity, and then yearn to leave the urban area and return to their small towns; and many recount complicated stories of love, sex, and community in their small-town lives that belie the closet model” (Halberstam 37). Similar stories are told by queer/LGBT Palestinians. Many Palestinian queer/LGBT organizations do not consider visibility, as defined in Brand Israel discourses and dominate US LGBT discourses, to be one of their goals (Ritchie 268). In his article “How do you ‘Say Come Out of the Closet’ in Arabic?,” Jason Ritchie quotes Rauda Marcos, the former chair of Palestinian queer/LGBT organization Al-Qaws as saying, “there are different kinds of visibilities,” and Western and Israeli queer activists do not generally understand that their kind of visibility “does not work for everyone” (Ritchie 268).

On its website Al-Qaws discusses describes its strategy for social justice by saying “We believe that we can transform prevailing attitudes in our society toward sexuality and gender only by preventing individuals and groups who do not value sexual and gender diversity from taking ownership of discourse about these issues” (Al Qaws). It’s clear that this is addressed both to Palestinian society and Brand Israel campaigners. Al Qaws writes,

We envision the project as an integral part of our larger mission of restructuring public social space by promoting a relevant, non-pejorative discourse of gender and sexual diversity that is based on the actual experiences of our community. The local relevance and intelligibility of such a discourse is particularly important because we have found, in our individual experiences and in our experiences as an organization, that hegemonic Western narratives of homosexuality—with their emphasis on “visibility” and “coming out of the closet”—are inadequate for two related reasons: in the first place, *such discourses do not effectively capture or respond to the actual needs and experiences of LGBTQ Palestinians*, and secondly, *they empower our most vocal opponents to represent us—LGBTQ Palestinians—as something foreign and inauthentic* (Emphasis mine). (Al Qaws)

By refusing to embrace visibility as a marker of queer liberation and by claiming the Israeli occupation as a queer issue, Palestinian queer/LGBT groups like Al Qaws challenge gay rights frameworks in favor of addressing structural violence more directly. In doing so, they call for a fundamental restructuring of power relations (Ritchie 571). This activist framework may be able to provide a method of struggle through which US queer people can work for queer liberation without drawing on the colonial discourses that I have described in this chapter. In the next chapter of this thesis, I will discuss the work of anti-pinkwashing movements and transgender movements that have embraced this queer liberation framework.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Anti-Pinkwashing Activists Building Movements for Queer Liberation**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I discuss how Palestinian Queers for BDS and Al Qaws are creating a global movement for queer liberation. I will discuss how they are framing their analysis and how that framing has influenced the protest movement they are leading. I argue that Palestinian Queers for BDS and Al Qaws are developing an exciting queer movement from which queer/LGBT activists around the world should learn. Anti-pinkwashing movements are organizing in a way that takes into account the different embodied social positions of their members. Anti-pinkwashing movements have the potential to address the racism that has long characterized the mainstream LGBT movement in the United States. Through creating a movement that addresses structural violence, anti-pinkwashing activists are shifting their focus from civil rights to queer liberation.

#### **Framing a Theoretical Response to Brand Israel: The Analysis of Palestinian Queers for Boycott, Divestments and Sanctions**

At the heart of the anti-pinkwashing movement is an analysis developed by the queer/LGBT Palestinians. Through articulating their experiences as queer/LGBT Palestinians, activists with Palestinian Queers for BDS have framed a response to Brand Israel rhetoric about gay rights that challenges its underlying assumptions. Subsequently, understanding the anti-pinkwashing movement begins by understanding the critique developed by Palestinian Queers for BDS (PQBDS).

In an open letter to queer people considering visiting Israel/Palestine, PQBDS writes, “After over sixty years of occupation and apartheid, the damaging effects of Israel’s wars in Lebanon, the invasion of Gaza in 2009, and the overwhelming growth of the BDS movement, the Israeli government re-initiated an old/new massive PR campaign called ‘Brand Israel.’ The purpose of the campaign was to whitewash Israel’s decades of war crimes and portray it as the only democratic country in the Middle East” (See Appendix B for the entire statement) (“An Open Letter to Queer Academics, Artists, and Activists”). By highlighting the context of the Brand Israel campaign, Palestinian Queers for BDS underscores from what exactly what the Israeli government is seeking to divert attention. PQBDS continues by explaining how Brand Israel rhetoric, which it calls pinkwashing, is operating in this context:

More recently, pinkwashing became a major component of this campaign. Israeli foreign affairs ministry, Israeli academic institutions, international Zionist and pro Israel groups, and some Israeli LGBTQ organizations/groups worked to capitalize on the modest successes of the Israeli LGBTQ community and pander to anti-Arab, Islamophobic biases by painting Palestinian society as maliciously homophobic. Indeed, a central theme in their pinkwashing campaign, which included numerous cultural events, tourism efforts targeting LGBTQ groups, and cultural products, was that Israel is the only gay haven in the Middle East and the only place Palestinian queers feel safe. Thus, pinkwashing in this context is a means of galvanizing support for the apartheid system and military occupation – all in the name of gay rights (Palestinian Queers for BDS “An Open Letter to Queer Academics, Artists, and Activists”).

PQBDS argues that queer/LGBT communities must adopt an intersectional lens that understands the connections between human rights issues. They call into question efforts to support LGBT rights that do not understand the context in which those rights are being invoked. PQBDS writes:

We believe that, as Queer communities, we must pay close attention to any grave human rights violations on our way to support the LGBTQ struggle, especially in a context where the country in question that oppresses, discriminates, and implements an apartheid system. We should question the ethics and the values of

Queer organizations or groups that voice fervent support for and participate in an apartheid state's institutions (Palestinian Queers for BDS, "An Open Letter to Queer Academics, Artists, and Activists").

Echoing the analysis of many transnational feminists from Palestine and other colonized contexts, PQBDS argues that their experiences as queer people cannot be separated from their experiences as Palestinians (see Kanaaneh and Nusair, Abu-Lughod "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?", Sabbagh). They urge queer activists around the world to understand the intersections between sexuality, gender, and race. PQBDS writes, "Human rights should not be compartmentalized, and the human rights of a certain group should not be more important than others'. We, as Palestinian queers, cannot ignore the struggle and the rights of the Palestinian people. To us, the two struggles go side by side" (Palestinian Queers for BDS, "An Open Letter to Queer Academics, Artists, and Activists"). PQBDS urges queer/LGBT activists to recognize the irreducibility of their struggle and use this analysis as a basis of a queer movement against Israeli settler-colonialism.

"We are determined to inform every person wishing to travel to Israel on the political and social realities of life in Israel/Palestine," PQBS continues ("An Open Letter to Queer Academics, Artists, and Activists"). PQBDS is unapologetic in tying their liberation as queer people to Palestinian liberation as a whole and in translating that connection into a clear call for international solidarity against Israeli settler-colonialism. They write, "'Occupation,' 'Palestinians,' 'Gaza,' 'apartheid,' 'ethnic cleansing,' 'boycott,' and 'refugees' are not terms you would come across in flyers, itineraries, and travel brochures promoting Israel; yet, these words define the daily lives of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation. As Palestinians and as queers, these words have shaped our history and continue to determine our future" ("An Open Letter to Queer Academics, Artists, and Activists"). PQBDS then describes how Israeli settler-

colonialism affects their everyday life. I have chosen to include their entire statement here because I believe that that all analysis of Brand Israel rhetoric needs to be connected back to these realities:

For [65] years, the Israeli occupation and expanding apartheid system has denied the Palestinian people their basic human rights. Palestinians in the West Bank have been living under a brutal military occupation manifested by illegal Israeli colonies, checkpoints, and a system of walls, barriers and roads accessible solely to Israeli settlers. Palestinians living inside Israel are continuously facing discriminatory policies. There are currently over 25 laws which specifically target them as non-Jewish and reduce them to second class citizens of Israel. Palestinians in the Diaspora and in UN administered refugee camps are by default denied their UN-sanctioned right to return to their lands. Finally, over 1.8 million Palestinian in the Gaza Strip are living in an open air prison under an illegal siege, described by many prominent international experts as “slow genocide.” Israeli oppression, racism, and discrimination does not distinguish between Queer Palestinians and Heterosexual Palestinians (Palestinian Queers for BDS, “An Open Letter to Queer Academics, Artists, and Activists”).

With their reminder that Israeli settler-colonialism does not discriminate between queer and heterosexual Palestinians, PQBDS challenges Brand Israel rhetoric by insisting that there is no way to support Palestinian queer/LGBT people except through working against Israeli settler-colonialism. In this way, PQBDS has framed its requests for international solidarity in a way that shifts the discourse about queer liberation in Palestine.

### ***PQBDS and the Palestinian Call for Boycott Divestment and Sanctions***

Rather than asking for supporters to join in a campaign for LGBT rights, PQBDS has asked activists to respond to the Palestinian call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions. This call, issued by over one hundred Palestinian civil society organizations in 2005, asked international civil society organizations and individuals to boycott Israeli products and institutions until Israel abides by international law in the following ways: ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands, recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to



full equality; and respecting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes (Barghouti, “BDS : Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions : The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights” 10).

By calling for a queer BDS movement, PQBDS accomplishes two important rhetorical moves. First, it articulates itself as a part of the mainstream Palestinian national movement (Bakan and Abu-Laban 48). By doing so, it names queer concerns and the Palestinian national struggle as inextricable and calls for a struggle at their intersections. Second, PQBDS gives a clear picture of the kind of solidarity it requests from people outside of Palestine. The Palestinian Call for BDS calls for a Palestinian-led solidarity movement that addresses Israeli settler-colonialism as an apartheid system. In this framework, queer solidarity is not a call for LGBT civil rights or a protest against homophobia within Palestinian society. Instead, it is a queer movement against apartheid. This framing represents a profound challenge to Brand Israel rhetoric.

### ***Theoretical Responses to PQBDS***

The theoretical analysis and call for solidarity developed by PQBDS has inspired activists around the world. Many of these activists have learned from and added nuance to the theoretical analysis developed by PQBDS. In July 2011, a delegation of women of color based in North America traveled to Palestine on a fact-finding and relationship-building tour. In a letter entitled, “Why We, as Women of Color, Join the Call for Divestment From Israel” they described their analysis of the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the intersections between their struggle and that of Palestinians (For the entire statement, see Appendix C):

“As indigenous and women of color feminists involved in multiple social justice

struggles, we sought to affirm our association with the growing international movement for a free Palestine. We wanted to see for ourselves the conditions under which Palestinian people live and struggle against what we can now confidently name as the Israeli project of apartheid and ethnic cleansing. Each and every one of us—including those members of our delegation who grew up in the Jim Crow South, in apartheid South Africa, and on Indian reservations in the U.S.—was shocked by what we saw” (Ransby).

The delegation described their visits with PQBDS and with the Arab Feminist Union and other women’s groups who spoke about their projects to resist gender and sexuality-based oppression and occupation together. The delegation echoed the analysis of PQBDS by writing:

“We also came to understand how overt repression is buttressed by deceptive representations of the state of Israel as the most developed social democracy in the region. As feminists, we deplore the Israeli practice of “pink-washing,” the state’s use of ostensible support for gender and sexual equality to dress-up its occupation. In Palestine, we consistently found evidence and analyses of a more substantive approach to an indivisible justice” (Ransby).

The Women of Color Delegation to Palestine underscores the importance framing anti-pinkwashing activism within an international analysis that draws upon the history of colonized people around the world. Following the Women of Color Delegation to Palestine, in January 2012 a group of queer academics, activists, artists, and cultural workers visited the West Bank to build relationships with Palestinian activists. Upon their return, the Queer delegation likewise released a statement articulating intersections between Israel's occupation of Palestine and heterosexism, calling heterosexism and sexism "colonial projects" (“Open Letter to LGBTIQ Communities and Allies on the Israeli Occupation of Palestine”). The delegation also criticized the ideological underpinnings of Brand Israel rhetoric (see Appendix D. for the entire statement):

"Key to Israel's pink washing campaign is the manipulative and false labeling of Israeli culture as gay-friendly and Palestinian culture as homophobic. It is our view that comparisons of this sort are both inaccurate – homophobia and

transphobia are to be found throughout Palestinian and Israeli society – and beside the point: Israel’s illegal occupation of Palestine cannot be somehow justified or excused by its purported tolerate treatment of some sector of its own population” (“Open Letter to LGBTIQ Communities and Allies on the Israeli Occupation of Palestine”).

Through articulating their understandings of Brand Israel rhetoric, these two delegations supported and expanded upon the thinking of PQBDS. In their 2010 call for queer participation in the BDS movement, Palestinian Queers for BDS wrote, “As Palestinian Queers, we see the Queer movements as political in their nature; and ones that analyze the intersections between different struggles, evaluate relations of power and try to challenge them” (“Palestinian Queers for BDS Call upon All Queer Groups, Organizations and Individuals around the World to Boycott the Apartheid State of Israel”).

Transgender people have also been important participants in anti-pinkwashing activism. For example, transgender lawyer, scholar and activist Dean Spade has been involved in anti-pinkwashing movements as both a member of the Queer Delegation to Palestine and in the campaign against the Rainbow Generations Tour. Dean Spade has added to the body of theoretical criticism of Brand Israel rhetoric by criticizing Brand Israel’s overwhelming focus on marriage rights and the right to serve in the military as indications of Israel’s gay-friendly status. Dean Spade has claimed that neither marriage nor military service improve the ability of queer/LGBT people to survive and thrive within either Israel or the United States<sup>7</sup>. Spade writes:

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<sup>7</sup> Of marriage, Spade writes:

Marriage is how the state ranks relationships by tying various property, parenting and tax statuses to how people organize their sexuality and families and register such arrangements with government agencies. Laws relating to marriage have traditionally operated to discipline unruly subjects, managing categorizations of race, gender, poverty, ability, criminality and nationality by imposing restrictions and/or avenues for relief reliant on marriage and parentage. The rules have

The idea that “good” policies about gay and lesbian rights in Israel and/or the U.S. are clear victories is increasingly contested. Critics argue that the purported progress on these fronts has failed to actually address the ongoing harms queer and trans people face and the broader systems of gender and sexual normalization that make queer and trans life precarious. Instead, the reforms advocated for primarily by white elites have offered symbolic change, or change that is only beneficial or most beneficial to elites, and/or have actually expanded or deepened technologies of control and violence. (Spade, “Under the Cover of Gay Rights” 99).

Spade has urged activists and scholars to reconsider whether civil rights and legal protections actually address the most urgent needs of queer/LGBT people, especially transgender people and queer/LGBT people of color.<sup>8</sup> In this way, he echoes and expands upon the analysis of PQBDS

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changed over time but marriage’s operation as an apparatus of social control remains (Spade, “Under the Cover of Gay Rights” 94).

Spade points out that marriage rights have been used to deny African American children the right to access particular social services based on the marital status of their parents. Furthermore, under Presidents George W. Bush and Barak Obama, communities of color and poor communities have been pressured to marry as a solution to poverty. Many Palestinians and their supporters have pointed out that marriage laws in Israel likewise function to maintain the domination of Israelis over Palestinians. Spade calls Israeli marriage laws a part of, “the ethnic cleansing project that seeks to win a demographic war to ensure that Jews outnumber Arabs and that a particular narrowly defined kind of Jewish life is cultivated” (Spade, “Normal Life” 95-6). For example, while Israel’s “Law of Return” gives Jewish people all over the world the right to citizenship in Israel, Israel’s marriage laws prevent Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza to acquire citizenship through their spouses living inside Israel (Spade, “Under the Cover of Gay Rights” 96).

Like marriage rights, the right to serve openly in the military is of dubious benefit to queer/LGBT people, but clearly perpetuates military expansion. Spade draws attention the context of jingoist anti-Arab sentiment that Brand Israel discourses draw on. Spade writes, “Meanwhile the loud drumbeat of anti-Muslim racism combines with the sentimental lovesongs of gay and lesbian military pride to drown out critiques of war and militarism. Anti-homophobia operates as a fresh talking point in the portrayal of a U.S. military that brings “equality” and “democracy” to the Arab world. (“Under the Cover of Gay Rights” 93).

<sup>8</sup> In his book Normal Life, Dean Spade describes a critical transgender politics that addresses “the conditions that shorten trans people’s lives” in the context of neo-liberalism (Spade “Normal Life” 13). Spade writes that he seeks to describe a transgender political movement that “demands more than legal recognition and inclusion, seeking instead to transform current logics of state, civil society, security, and social equality” (Spade, “Normal Life” 19). Spade argues that this approach more successfully improves the lives of transgender people than the legal reform and inclusion strategy used by mainstream LGBT organizations. Spade writes:

Rather than a focus on changing the law in ways that are supposed to declare the equality and worth of trans people’s lives but in fact prove to have little impact on the daily lives of the people they purportedly protect, a distributive analysis suggests a focus on laws and policies that produce systemic norms and regularities that make trans people’s lives administratively impossible (Spade, “Normal Life” 10).

and Al-Qaws, which have argued that civil rights do not sufficiently address the oppression they experience as queer Palestinians and that queer movements must address colonialism and militarism as queer concerns. Through this analysis, PQBDS, Al-Qaws, and Spade are countering Brand Israel's emphasis on inclusion and protection within the nation state by emphasizing queer activism to challenge structural violence directly.

### **From Theory to Praxis: Queer Anti-Occupation Activism**

Out of the theoretical framework developed by PQBDS, a lively queer anti-occupation movement is growing. Led by Palestinian and Arab queer activists, Queer/LGBT organizations began confronting with Brand Israel campaigns when Jerusalem was selected to host the second annual World Pride celebration in 2005 ("Queer BDS Chronology"). InterPride organizers, the licensors of WorldPride, announced that Jerusalem would be the site of the 2006 World Pride celebration in October of 2005. They made their announcement less than three months after the BDS call. In response to this call for solidarity, Queers Undermining Israeli Terrorism (QUIT), a San Francisco, California-based organization, organized a campaign for a boycott of World Pride. QUIT worked closely with Palestinian, Lebanese, and Arab queer groups, including ASWAT (Arabic for "voices"), Helem (Arabic for "dream"), and the International

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Spade suggests that a resistance movement that improves the life-chances of transgender people necessitates a different understanding of power. Legal and reform strategies that stress inclusion and recognition afford limited possibilities for addressing harm experienced by transgender people because they focus on individual discrimination. Spade applies the "perpetrator perspective" concept developed by critical race theorist Alan Freeman to explain why it is difficult for transgender people to win legal cases and why those victories do not translate into improvements in the daily lives of transgender people, especially those experiencing the greatest subjugation (Spade, "Normal Life" 84). Spade cites Freeman's argument that anti-discrimination laws fundamentally misunderstand oppression by describing it as something that happens between an individual perpetrator and victim. This understanding of discrimination fails to account for the structural aspects of oppression. Legal reforms therefore not only fail to address oppression but can also function to normalize oppressive systems and render their functioning invisible. Spade suggests that queer movements must understand how disciplinary power and population management create more limited chances for survival experienced for transgender people.

Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, as well as queer Israeli anti-occupation groups.

In its statement calling for a boycott of World Pride, QUIT wrote:

...Jerusalem is a city divided by check-points, patrolled by the IDF and the bleakest symbol of Israeli occupation of Palestine.

Right now Israel is completing its apartheid wall, and has just completed a series of attacks on the infrastructure of the Gaza Strip and have isolated one and a half million people so that they have little access to food or other necessary supplies. Then there is the attacks on the civilian population of Lebanon with air strikes and a ground war.

Palestinians must carry identity cards and pass through checkpoints to move around even within the limited area they are supposed to have control of. Israel is an occupying force in Palestine and an aggressor in the region –the current conflict in Lebanon is only the latest in over fifty years of expansionist policy....We support the boycott of World pride Jerusalem and stand in solidarity with LGBTIQ groups and all those opposing Israeli state terror" ("Boycott World Pride Jerusalem")

QUIT's call for a campaign boycotting WorldPride Jerusalem represents an early articulation of the arguments that organizations and individuals concerned with Brand Israel rhetoric have since more fully developed. Today, activists are targeting Brand Israel events and hosting their own educational initiatives. Anti-pinkwashing activists have shut down Stand With Us presentations, protested film screenings sponsored by the Israeli government, protested LGBT nonprofits who collaborate with Brand Israel events, and participated as queer people in the broader BDS movement. To illustrate how this movement is resisting Brand Israel discourses, I'll give three examples of the North American anti-pinkwashing movement, discussing how they analyze anti-pinkwashing and how their analysis shapes their strategies and tactics.

### *Queers Undermining Israeli Terrorism*

QUIT has continued its activism since its campaign against WorldPride. QUIT presents a creative and nuanced discussion of social positions within the queer community. Many queer theories and movements create cohesion by deemphasizing differences between queer people, causing queer people to, as feminist scholar Suzanna Walters describes it, “lose sight of ‘from where we speak’” (Cohen 841). QUIT, by contrast, emphasizes differing levels of power and privilege within the queer community.

Echoing the analysis of PQBDS, QUIT reflects a complex understanding of its social position in its mission statement. QUIT describes how queer liberation is tied to the liberation of all people. Then QUIT goes on to explain their complicity in Israeli colonialism as United States residents and tax payers. QUIT writes, “Our [tax dollars]— nearly \$8 million per day!— is funding the indiscriminate murder and wounding of Palestinian civilians, the destruction of Palestinian homes, the construction of exclusively Jewish settlements and the closure of the occupied territories” (Queers Undermining Israeli Terrorism, “About QUIT”). This sense of complicity is reflected in the street theatre organized by QUIT through creative and confrontational protests and reflected a complex understanding of the positionality of QUIT members.

In April 2010, QUIT protested a film series called “Out in Israel,” which QUIT identified as an example of Brand Israel rhetoric. QUIT demonstration included a skit activists called “Queer Eye for the Palestinian village.” QUIT described the skit on their website:

A couple Queer Guys were called in to give a makeover to a West Bank village so it could be turned into a queer-friendly Jewish settlement. Just rip out those unsightly olive trees, get a Caterpillar bulldozer to get rid of that mosque — so over — and you’ll have a perfect view of Tel Aviv and a great square for nude sunbathing. Oh, but you’ll need some hot Israeli soldiers to come in and kill all

the people who are living there (Queers Undermining Israeli Terrorism, “QUIT Actions In Support of Divestment and Boycott of Israel”).

In 2003, QUIT held a similar demonstration targeting Starbucks CEO Howard Shultz, a prominent supporter of Israeli Apartheid. In a humorous action, activists dressed up as the “Queer Defense Forces” (referencing the Israeli Defense Forces) and “queer settlers” (a reference to Israeli settlers that have seized Palestinian houses and land) and “occupied” a Starbucks coffee shop. They designed their protest to parody the religious and political rhetoric used by Israel, with a queer twist:

About 25 queer settlers descended on a downtown Berkeley Starbucks on Saturday, August 17, 2003 claiming Berkeley as “a city without people for people without a city.” The group...posted a banner proclaiming the reclaimed café “Queerkeley – A Prophecy Fulfilled.” They also erected homes...lawn furniture, and signs reading, “It Works In Palestine, Why Not Here?” and “It’s Ours Because We Say So” (Queers Undermining Israeli Terrorism, “Queer Settlers Land of Berkeley”).

Both of these skits use LGBT pop culture to humorously illustrate Brand Israel rhetoric and QUIT’s sense of complicity with the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Through the roles of the Queer Guys, the Queer Defense Forces and the Queer Settlers, QUIT casts queer people in the role of oppressors. QUIT’s street performances use queer iconography and Israeli rhetoric and reassembles them to describe queers living the United States as both oppressed by heterosexism and complicit in the oppression of queer Palestinians. As a group of activists of different races, religions, national statuses, QUIT is articulating a complex queer identity that is largely unrepresented in the gay rights framework.

Anti-pinkwashing organizations highlight the diversity of the queer community, placing emphasis on the implications of national, racial, and religious location. By emphasizing a



complex understanding of queer identities, anti-pinkwashing organizations have built a successful international solidarity movement.

### ***Pacific Northwest Anti-Pinkwashing Organizing***

I have discussed the organizational descriptions of anti-pinkwashing groups as a means of describing how Brand Israel rhetoric is being framed and how that framing effects their work. In some ways, this focus on organizations presents an inaccurate picture of the anti-pinkwashing movement. Many, if not most anti-pinkwashing campaigns are organized by coalitions and networks of activists, rather than singular organizations. In fact, the anti-pinkwashing movement challenges the increasing centralization and professionalization of queer/LGBT movements. Over the last 30 years, the rise of LGBT NGOs has helped to shift the queer/LGBT movement from a mass movement to a professionalized social service model. Many activists, including those in the anti-pinkwashing movement, have argued that this makes LGBT nonprofits less responsive to LGBT communities and more responsive to large donors and governmental pressure. In fact, Brand Israel campaigns could not exist without professionalized LGBT nonprofits. The development of large LGBT community centers funded by foundations and governments and commercialized pride parades provides the infrastructure that allows the Israeli government to target large queer/LGBT audiences. Furthermore, the shift from a movement oriented around ideas of "gay and lesbian liberation" to a LGBTQ nonprofit complex working for "gay rights" provides key ideological building-blocks for Brand Israel discourses by changing the emphasis of the LGBT movement. Anti-pinkwashing organizing often targets LGBT institutions and spaces that are collaborating with the Israeli government through Brand Israel

events. In this way, grassroots activists are challenging both Brand Israel rhetoric and the US nonprofit system.

The Washington State campaign to oppose the “Rainbow Generations: Building New LGBTQ Pride & Inclusion in Israel” tour is an excellent example both of the grassroots, coalitional, and informal nature of anti-pinkwashing activism and the way that anti-pinkwashing challenges the terms of the Brand Israel campaign. In March of 2012, a loose-knit group of activists organized to oppose the Rainbow Generations Pacific Northwest tour, a series of Brand Israel events sponsored by the Israeli consulate and Stand With Us. The tour brought four leaders from Israeli LGBT organizations to “share the innovative work they are doing in Israel, learn from counterparts in the US, and build relationships for future collaboration” (Somerson).

Wendy Somerson, an activist with Jewish Voice for Peace, described how activists campaigned against the tour. Somerson writes, “When we heard about the pinkwashing tour, queer anti-Occupation activists across the Puget Sound quickly started making phone calls, writing letters, organizing teach-ins, and holding protests. And we were gaining momentum: An event at a youth center in Tacoma was cancelled, and an event in Olympia that was forced to switch venues at the last minute was poorly attended” (Somerson). These victories were heartening for activists, but the event in Seattle, Washington was still scheduled to move ahead. As the headlining event for the tour, activists believed that cancelling the Seattle event would be the most difficult to oppose, but they were committed to trying.

On March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2012, a group of activists testified before Seattle’s LGBT Commission, the hosts of the Seattle stop of the Rainbow Generations tour. To make their case, they argued that the Rainbow Generations tour was not a neutral forum. When Brand Israel supporters claimed that

the activists should be open to dialogue, they responded that a true dialogue wasn't possible at an event where no Palestinians would be presenting. Furthermore, they argued that Brand Israel events, like this one, make Palestinian queer/LGBT people invisible by hiding the horrors of the Israeli occupation and the uneven way that Israeli civil rights are distributed within Israel. Activists argued that Brand Israel rhetoric creates a discursive framework that makes queer/LGBT Palestinians impossible subjects. Therefore, they resisted this framework by centering the voices of queer/LGBT Palestinians living in Seattle (Somerson).

During testimony to the Seattle LGBT Commission, Palestinian-American Activist Selma Al-Aswad, read from the following letter:

My life and upbringing in Washington State isn't a coincidence. My family settled here after my father's ancestral home was ethnically cleansed in 1948 Palestine. He became a refugee as a young person, and it is by this very truth, and the trajectories that follow, that have led me to settling in Washington state and Seattle. My queer identity is steeped in and inextricably linked to the dispossession of my family and community by the state of Israel...Events like this have become part of a strategic campaign where LGBT culture is exploited and manipulated to promote the idea that Israel is a great place for all LGBT people. This strategy has come to be called pinkwashing by those who oppose it. It directly hurts queer people like me, and our entire community (Fox).

Wendy Somerson writes that following Al-Aswad's testimony, other Palestinians spoke, including "Laila, a queer Palestinian whose family has Israeli citizenship, explained that her family members are treated as fourth-class citizens within Israel. She described how her visits to Israel are accompanied by government harassment simply because of her ancestry" (Somerson).

According to the activists who testified to the commission, these stories moved the Commissioners. Somerson writes:

But then something extraordinary happened. With tears in his eyes and a voice shaking with emotion, one of the Commissioners said that he felt they had made a huge mistake because they had no idea that holding this event meant

marginalizing and invisibilizing Palestinian LGBT folks. Another Commissioner followed this brave lead by saying he felt nauseous just thinking about how they were being used to promote government propaganda. Many Commissioners described their own naiveté when they agreed to host this event and their subsequent confusion (Somerson).

Six of the eight commissioners voted to cancel the Rainbow Generations event. Selma Al-Aswad has emphasized the importance of centering the voices of queer Palestinians. She argues that this was instrumental to the success of this campaign, but also points out that queer Palestinian voices are rarely heeded (Pinkwatching Israel, “Panel on “What Is Queer BDS? Pinkwashing, Intersections, Struggles, Politics”). Creating space for queer Palestinians to speak and challenge the forces that would silence them is one of the most powerful parts of anti-pinkwashing activism.

## **Conclusions**

In this chapter, I have described how the anti-pinkwashing movement is challenging Brand Israel rhetoric by articulating connections between oppressions and centering the voices and analysis of queer/LGBT Palestinians. The anti-pinkwashing movement has drawn attention to the way that settler-colonialism and military occupation make queer/LGBT life precarious and thereby expose the fallacies of Brand Israel rhetoric. By doing so, it draws on a legacy of third-world women’s and transnational feminist thought. The anti-pinkwashing movement is bringing new energy to radical movements by working at the intersections of multiple struggles. It provides many lessons from which queer activists can learn which I will discuss in the following chapter.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusion: Learning from the Anti-Pinkwashing Movement

Brand Israel rhetoric about gay rights draws on powerful beliefs and assumptions about Arabs, Muslims, and other people of color that have held persuasive power in the United States for centuries. As I have argued, Brand Israel rhetoric draws upon a conception of Arab/Muslim culture as backward, regressive and primitive. This conception of what colonialists called the Orient was developed through the process of colonialism in the Middle East- and used to justify that process. Colonial authorities like Lord Cromer, British Consul for Egypt, argued that Arab women needed to be saved by the British Empire from the perverted, damaged masculinity of Arab men (Ahmed 151). These ideas echoed the gendered, racial, and sexualized justifications given by European colonialists for the colonial domination of the Americas. British colonialists argued that they were cultural superiors to the people they conquered, leading British feminists to argue that this racial superiority combined with their moral superiority as Christian women justified giving women the vote. These discourses were manifested as iconic images of the Middle East: veiled women, violent Arab men, exotic sexual practice, and queer perversions.

These images of the Middle East long circulated in public debates about the Middle East in the United States, the primary target of the Brand Israel strategy. Stand With Us and Blue Star each use of these images of depraved Arab/Muslim people to frame their claims about gay rights in Israel. Through this framing, they create a discourse in which it becomes logical to assume that Palestinian and Arab/Muslim culture is violent not only towards women, but also towards queer/LGBT people. Because of colonial rhetoric about the importance of “saving” Arab and Muslim women, Americans are predisposed to believe that Israel must save gay Palestinians.

Under this logic, the civil rights and legal protection of certain gay non-Arab Israelis becomes a marker of modernity and progress – indeed, of civilization itself. While many theorists and activists have argued that these homonationalist Brand Israel discourses are new, Stand With Us and Blue Star’s ads about women’s and gay rights show that Brand Israel strategies rely on much older rhetoric about Arab women. Because the stated goal of Brand Israel is to make Israel appear “relevant and modern” to US audiences, it is important to highlight exactly how old these ideas about the Middle East really are. This history reveals the racism that is implicit in Brand Israel rhetoric that should be countered by anti-pinkwashing movements.

Brand Israel is powerful, in part, because of the way that it structures the conversation about Israel. Stand With Us and Blue Star have created materials that focus attention on gay rights and pride events and use colonial rhetoric about Arab/Muslim women to paint Arab/Muslim culture as deadly to both women and queer/LGBT people. This is an attempt to confer legitimacy on the state of Israel as a “gay-friendly” country. It also makes Palestinian queer subjects unintelligible and shifts attention away from Israel’s settler-colonial project.

How activists and scholars respond to Brand Israel matters. It can be tempting to argue against Brand Israel rhetoric by pointing out the inaccurate claims about gay rights in Israel presented in Stand With Us and Blue Star materials. While it is important to understand how homonationalism justifies unequally distributed rights, it is profoundly distasteful to use discrimination and violence against queer/LGBT Israelis as a rhetorical victory against Brand Israel discourses. Such a response perpetuates the dichotomy that Brand Israel seeks to establish between Israel and Palestine and the rest of the Middle East by treating civil rights as the most

important means of assessing the well-being afforded to queer/LGBT people and ignoring the way the Israeli occupation of Palestine violates the human rights of queer/LGBT people.

Furthermore, this argument damages the possibilities for a transnational movement for queer liberation.

Palestinian queer/LGBT activists have responded to Brand Israel rhetoric through organizing a global solidarity movement that challenges the gay rights framework used by Brand Israel. By doing so, organizations like Palestinian Queers for BDS are challenging the idea that liberation for queer/LGBT people can be achieved solely through inclusion in the nation state through civil rights and legal protection. Instead, they claim that addressing the larger structural violence directly is instrumental to improving the lives of queer/LGBT people. In this way, activists are shifting from a discourse about civil rights to a movement for queer liberation that addressed the structural violence directly, rather than focusing on inclusion and legal protection.

When Angela Davis spoke about the anti-pinkwashing movement at the 2012 World Social Forum, she argued that the strength of its analysis lies in the way it specifically articulates intersections between race, gender, and sexuality. Davis said that anti-pinkwashing theory “allows us to read the racism and the violence that is covered up by the punitively pro-gay stances of Israel... I think this is very powerful and queer BDS...it seems to me has helped racial forces develop new ways of engaging in ideological struggle...What appears to be small and marginal is actually vast and central” (Pinkwashing Israel, “Panel on “What Is Queer BDS? Pinkwashing, Intersections, Struggles, Politics”). The impact of the anti-pinkwashing movement is larger than is initially obvious. This movement is challenging more than the rhetorical framing

of Brand Israel campaigns. Instead, this movement is a multi-faceted movement challenging the legacies of colonialism in multiple contexts.

Inside Israel, Palestinian queer activism challenges Israeli narratives about their cultural superiority over Palestinians and other Arabs and Muslims. PQBDS and Al Qaws are opposing missionary mentalities that date from colonial times. This colonial narrative depends on the invisibility of queer/LGBT Palestinians so that a picture can be created of pitiable, unhappy gay Palestinians who must leave their culture in order to be safe. Through organizing a direct challenge to the Israeli settler-colonial regime, PQBDS challenges this narrative and instead directs attention back to Israel's domination of Palestine.

Within Palestinian society, PQBDS and Al Qaws are challenging nationalist rhetoric which separates gender and sexual liberation from the Palestinian national struggle. Like feminists in many other anti-colonial movements, PQBDS argues that their struggle is an integral part of the national movement and is a concern here and now, rather than an issue to be addressed only in a free Palestine. Through their advocacy of the BDS strategy, PQBDS positions themselves well within the Palestinian mainstream and clearly articulates what kind of international solidarity they want.

In queer/LGBT movements, anti-pinkwashing movements are challenging the belief that civil rights and legal protection are sufficient for queer/LGBT liberation. Like many other movements, such as trans movements and queer anti-prison movements, anti-pinkwashing movements call into question the value of gay marriage and military service- not only by pointing out the unequal access to these rights in both the United States and Israel, but by describing how these rights are used to justify colonial projects.



Anti-pinkwashing challenges rhetoric and activist praxis that codes queer/LGBT as a concern by and for white people. Through a focus on civil rights legislation and that addresses the concerns primarily of white, middle-class, cis-gender gay men, both Brand Israel and US mainstream LGBT movement create the impression that queer liberation is only of interest to white people. In fact, as I discussed in chapter three, Brand Israel rhetoric relies on images that depict queer people of color as criminal perverts and people of color as inherently queer. Palestinians like the members of PQBDS are responding by articulating racism and colonialism as queer concerns. The anti-pinkwashing movement has enjoyed success when it centers the voices of queer/LGBT Palestinians. I fervently hope that it will serve as an example of anti-racist organizing for other queer movements.

Through the theory developed by the anti-pinkwashing movement, queer people have the opportunity to understand how race, sexuality, and gender have been constructed together and how oppression based on these categories can be effectively resisted at their intersections. The anti-pinkwashing movement is exciting because it addresses some of the most profound critiques of queer movements. The anti-pinkwashing movement addresses the embodied differences between its members, encouraging activists to dramatically highlight differences in power amongst queer/LGBT and build solidarity across them. The anti-pinkwashing movement also creates spaces in which queer people of color, who are depicted as impossible subjects, confront their oppression on their own terms. Finally, through its critique of civil rights and legal protection, the anti-pinkwashing movement is returning the focus of LGBT movements to structural violence and towards queer liberation.

While the critique of the anti-pinkwashing movement is inspiring revitalized queer activism, I believe that there is still a need for more explicit discussion of the connections between race,

gender, and sexuality and the historical context out of which Brand Israel rhetoric has been developed. Understanding this history exposes the racist assumptions that underlie the arguments made by Brand Israel campaigns. Such an understanding can only help queer/LGBT activists address the racism that plagues our communities. By engaging directly with the materials developed by Stand With Us and Blue Star, I hope that I have developed specific examples of colonial rhetoric that can be productively used by anti-pinkwashing activists.

As I have argued, the anti-pinkwashing movement challenges many racist assumptions that still hold resonance within US queer/LGBT communities and movements. Perhaps the aspect of anti-pinkwashing critique that fills with the most hope is its challenge to the idea that Arabs and Muslims need white Westerners to save them. Activists with organizations like Al Qaws and PQBDS powerfully show that is not the case. Instead, the anti-pinkwashing movement extends a hand of solidarity to Western LGBT movements and offers assistance to our struggles. The anti-pinkwashing movement provides new, invigorating energy to everyone that is seeking to challenge oppression based on race, sexuality, and gender.

We in the United States too often do not understand how thoroughly we ourselves are affected by the colonization of the Americas and the neoliberal economic order that is gaining power over our lives. Omar Barghouti, one of the thinkers behind the Palestinian Call for BDS and a supporter of the anti-pinkwashing movement writes to Americans that while Palestine is clearly occupied, “Your prison cells, however, are quite different. The walls are well hidden lest they evoke your will to resist. There is no door to your prison cell -- you may roam about “freely,” never recognizing the much larger prison you are still confined to” (Barghouti, “I Wish You Egypt”). Anti-pinkwashing activists and the larger Palestinian movement are helping Americans to understand the violence perpetuated by the US government are providing an example of what

it means to confront it. At several events about the BDS movement and pinkwashing, Omar Barghouti has closed by reading an essay he wrote following the Egyptian revolution against President Hosni Mubarak. It contains wishes from the Middle East to the United States for another sort of revolution. To end this thesis, I reproduce part of Barghouti's essay:

I wish you Egypt so you can collectively, democratically, and responsibly re-build your societies; to reset the rules so as to serve the people, not savage capital and its banking arm; to end racism and all sorts of discrimination; to look after and be in harmony with the environment; to cut wars and war crimes, not jobs, benefits and public services; to invest in education and healthcare, not in fossil fuel and weapons research; to overthrow the repressive, tyrannical rule of multinationals; and to get the hell out of Afghanistan, Iraq, and everywhere else where under the guise of "spreading democracy" your self-righteous crusades have spread social and cultural disintegration, abject poverty and utter hopelessness (Barghouti, "I Wish You Egypt").

There is much that queer struggles in the United States can learn from the Palestinian movement.

Like Barghouti, I wish my communities the determination of the Palestinian people and the courage and wisdom offered by the anti-pinkwashing movement.

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## Appendix

### A. The Palestinian Call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions

Published by the Palestinian BDS National Committee on July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2005

Available at: <http://www.bdsmovement.net/call>

#### **The Palestinian Civil Society Calls for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel until it Complies with International Law and Universal Principles of Human Rights**

One year after the historic Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) which found Israel's Wall built on occupied Palestinian territory to be illegal; Israel continues its construction of the colonial Wall with total disregard to the Court's decision. Thirty eight years into Israel's occupation of the Palestinian West Bank (including East Jerusalem), Gaza Strip and the Syrian Golan Heights, Israel continues to expand Jewish colonies. It has unilaterally annexed occupied East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights and is now de facto annexing large parts of the West Bank by means of the Wall. Israel is also preparing – in the shadow of its lanned redeployment from the Gaza Strip – to build and expand colonies in the West Bank. Fifty seven years after the state of Israel was built mainly on land ethnically cleansed of its Palestinian owners, a majority of Palestinians are refugees, most of whom are stateless. Moreover, Israel's entrenched system of racial discrimination against its own Arab-Palestinian citizens remains intact.

In light of Israel's persistent violations of international law; and

Given that, since 1948, hundreds of UN resolutions have condemned Israel's colonial and discriminatory policies as illegal and called for immediate, adequate and effective remedies; and

Given that all forms of international intervention and peace-making have until now failed to convince or force Israel to comply with humanitarian law, to respect fundamental human rights and to end its occupation and oppression of the people of Palestine; and

In view of the fact that people of conscience in the international community have historically shouldered the moral responsibility to fight injustice, as exemplified in the struggle to abolish apartheid in South Africa through diverse forms of boycott, divestment and sanctions; and

Inspired by the struggle of South Africans against apartheid and in the spirit of international solidarity, moral consistency and resistance to injustice and oppression;

We, representatives of Palestinian civil society, call upon international civil society organizations and people of conscience all over the world to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era. We appeal to you to pressure your respective states to impose embargoes and sanctions against Israel. We also invite conscientious Israelis to support this Call, for the sake of justice and genuine peace.

These non-violent punitive measures should be maintained until Israel meets its obligation to recognize the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and fully complies with the precepts of international law by:

1. Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the Wall
2. Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality;  
and
3. Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN resolution 194.

Endorsed by:

The Palestinian political parties, unions, associations, coalitions and organizations below represent the three integral parts of the people of Palestine: Palestinian refugees, Palestinians under occupation and Palestinian citizens of Israel.

## **B. An Open letter to Queer Academics, Artists, and Activists**

Published by Palestinian Queers for BDS on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2011

Available at: <http://www.pqbds.com/2011/02/23/an-open-letter-to-queer-academics-artists-and-activists/>

Dear queers, academics, artists and activists,

Some of you might be planning a visit to Israel to participate, and maybe even support, queer, cultural or academic events. Some of you might be visiting for religious or personal reasons, or perhaps simply out of curiosity. While an invitation to Israel might seem flattering and exciting, we hope that – before taking a stand and booking that flight – you read the following open letter, written by Palestinian queers, activists, academics and artists, to queers, activists, academics and artists around the world.

We are determined to inform every person wishing to travel to Israel on the political and social realities of life in Israel/Palestine. “Occupation,” “Palestinians,” “Gaza,” “apartheid,” “ethnic cleansing,” “boycott,” and “refugees” are not terms you would come across in flyers, itineraries, and travel brochures promoting Israel; yet, these words define the daily lives of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation. As Palestinians and as queers, these words have shaped our history and continue to determine our future.

Some of you might feel that boycotting Israel would be too one-sided for such a complex conflict. You might think that it is too controversial. Some of you are probably wondering whether this boycott movement is actually effective. To start the conversation, we put together background information on BDS and Israel/Palestine; and we also encourage you to get in touch and explore with us any questions or issues you might have with BDS. Our aim is for every person to have a historically-informed understanding of Israel/Palestine, and for every queer, academic, artist, and activist to support the Palestinian civil society’s call for BDS.

### **1) I don’t know much about the BDS campaign and cultural and academic boycotts. What are they?**

In April 2004 a group of Palestinian academics and intellectuals met in Ramallah to launch the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) to join the growing international boycott movement. In July 2004, the Campaign issued a Call for Boycott addressed to the international community urging:

- A comprehensive and consistent boycott of all Israeli academic and cultural institutions until Israel withdraws from all the lands occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem;
- A removal of all its colonies in those lands;
- Compliance with United Nations resolutions relevant to the restitution of Palestinian refugees’ rights;
- Dismantlement of its system of apartheid.

This statement was met with widespread support, and has to date been endorsed by nearly sixty Palestinian academic, cultural and other civil society federations, unions, and organizations, including the Federation of Unions of Palestinian Universities' Professors and Employees and the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO) in the West Bank.

On July 9, 2005, the clear majority of Palestinian civil society called upon the international civil society organizations and people of conscience from around the world to start imposing a broad boycott and divestment measurements against Israel, inspired by the successful Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Campaigns against apartheid in South Africa. The goal was to send a message to Israel and pressure it to meet its obligations, recognize the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination, and fully comply with international law. Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) has been endorsed by over 170 Palestinian parties, organizations, trade unions, and movements representing the majority of the Palestinian people. Given the breadth of its participants and endorsers, BDS movement is the most significant nonviolent movement against Israeli apartheid.

Following these calls on June 27th 2010, a group of Palestinian Queer activists issued a call, calling upon all LGBTQI groups, organizations and individuals around the world to Boycott the Apartheid State of Israel.<sup>4</sup>

### **1. But if I am in solidarity with the LGBTQ communities, how can I boycott queers?**

We believe that, as Queer communities, we must pay close attention to any grave human rights violations on our way to support the LGBTQ struggle, especially in a context where the country in question that oppresses, discriminates, and implements an apartheid system. We should question the ethics and the values of Queer organizations or groups that voice fervent support for and participate in an apartheid state's institutions. Human rights should not be compartmentalized, and the human rights of a certain group should not be more important than others'. We, as Palestinian queers, cannot ignore the struggle and the rights of the Palestinian people. To us, the two struggles go side by side.

For 62 years, the Israeli occupation and expanding apartheid system has denied the Palestinian people their basic human rights. Palestinians in the West Bank have been living under a brutal military occupation manifested by illegal Israeli colonies, checkpoints, and a system of walls, barriers and roads accessible solely to Israeli settlers. Palestinians living inside Israel are continuously facing discriminatory policies. There are currently over 25 laws which specifically target them as non-Jewish and reduce them to second class citizens of Israel. Palestinians in the Diaspora and in UN administered refugee camps are by default denied their UN-sanctioned right to return to their lands. Finally, over 1.8 million Palestinian in the Gaza Strip are living in an open air prison under an illegal siege, described by many prominent international experts as "slow genocide." Israeli oppression, racism, and discrimination does not distinguish between Queer Palestinians and Heterosexual Palestinians.

### **3) What events should I boycott?**

After over sixty years of occupation and apartheid, the damaging effects of Israel's wars in Lebanon, the invasion of Gaza in 2009, and the overwhelming growth of the BDS movement, the Israeli government re-initiated an old/new massive PR campaign called 'Brand Israel.' The purpose of the campaign was to whitewash Israel's decades of war crimes and portray it as the only democratic country in the Middle East.

More recently, pinkwashing became a major component of this campaign. Israeli foreign affairs ministry, Israeli academic institutions, international Zionist and pro Israel groups, and some Israeli LGBTQ organizations/groups worked to capitalize on the modest successes of the Israeli LGBTQ community and pander to anti-Arab, Islamophobic biases by painting Palestinian society as maliciously homophobic. Indeed, a central theme in their pinkwashing campaign, which included numerous cultural events, tourism efforts targeting LGBTQ groups, and cultural products, was that Israel is the only gay haven in the Middle East and the only place Palestinian queers feel safe. Thus, pinkwashing in this context is a mean of galvanizing support for the apartheid system and military occupation – all in the name of gay rights.

Most Israeli LGBTQ groups, Israeli academic institutions, Israel support groups worldwide, whether officially part of the 'Brand Israel' campaign or not, are often supporters complicit in the Israeli war crimes, and the effort to pinkwash these crimes and should be boycotted. According to 'The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel – PACBI' and their general overriding rule, virtually all Israeli cultural and academic events, groups and organizations (i.e. universities, museums, film festivals etc...), unless proven otherwise, are complicit in maintaining the Israeli occupation and therefore boycottable.

### **4) Can you be more specific? What is boycottable?**

The following situations are boycottable:

- All Israeli cultural and academic institutions (i.e. universities, museums, film festivals etc...), unless proven otherwise, receive state funding and are, thus, complicit in maintaining the Israeli occupation and should be boycotted. This means that events organized by any of those, or cooperation with them should be avoided.
- Any group/organization that actively participates in Pinkwashing Israeli war crimes should be boycotted
- Any group/organization that is part of the 'Gay tourism in Israel' project to promote TLV and Israel as the gay haven of the Middle East.

### **5) So, what can I do? And How Palestinian Queers for BDS can help me?**

It is always legitimate to ask your host to provide information about the event/product: Who are the organizing partners? Is the event funded and/or commissioned even partially, by an official Israeli body or a complicit institution? What is goal of the event and its vision? You can learn a lot from raising these "obvious" questions.

Secondly, if your hosts do not provide (or do not know) the needed information, ask them to direct their inquiries to PQBDS. Most Israeli queer groups and organizations are not familiar with BDS and are not aware they are part of systematic oppression. Encouraging them to make direct contact with us will not only help you to collect the needed information, but will also help raise awareness among these groups about the importance of BDS.

Thirdly, PQBDS are willing to help and guide you personally through this process. We will be more than happy to provide the necessary information, make contacts with relevant parties, and respond to you regarding whether the event meets the boycott's guidelines.

Please consider us the "go-to person" for ANY question you may have regarding BDS, especially queer BDS situations.

**We look forward to your questions and inquiries. Our email is: [pq4bds@gmail.com](mailto:pq4bds@gmail.com)**

### **C. Why We, as Women of Color, Join the Call for Divestment From Israel**

Written by the Women of Color Delegation to Palestine on July 13, 2011

Available at:

[http://colorlines.com/archives/2011/07/women\\_of\\_color\\_delegation\\_to\\_occupied\\_palestine.html](http://colorlines.com/archives/2011/07/women_of_color_delegation_to_occupied_palestine.html)

#### **Justice for Palestine: A Call to Action from Indigenous and Women of Color Feminists**

Between June 14 and June 23, 2011, a delegation of 11 scholars, activists, and artists visited occupied Palestine. As indigenous and women of color feminists involved in multiple social justice struggles, we sought to affirm our association with the growing international movement for a free Palestine. We wanted to see for ourselves the conditions under which Palestinian people live and struggle against what we can now confidently name as the Israeli project of apartheid and ethnic cleansing. Each and every one of us—including those members of our delegation who grew up in the Jim Crow South, in apartheid South Africa, and on Indian reservations in the U.S.—was shocked by what we saw. In this statement we describe some of our experiences and issue an urgent call to others who share our commitment to racial justice, equality, and freedom.

During our short stay in Palestine, we met with academics, students, youth, leaders of civic organizations, elected officials, trade unionists, political leaders, artists, and civil society activists, as well as residents of refugee camps and villages that have been recently attacked by Israeli soldiers and settlers. Everyone we encountered—in Nablus, Awarta, Balata, Jerusalem, Hebron, Dheisheh, Bethlehem, Birzeit, Ramallah, Um el-Fahem, and Haifa—asked us to tell the truth about life under occupation and about their unwavering commitment to a free Palestine. We were deeply impressed by people's insistence on the linkages between the movement for a free Palestine and struggles for justice throughout the world; as Martin Luther King, Jr. insisted throughout his life, "Justice is indivisible. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Traveling by bus throughout the country, we saw vast numbers of Israeli settlements ominously perched in the hills, bearing witness to the systematic confiscation of Palestinian land in flagrant violation of international law and United Nations resolutions. We met with refugees across the country whose families had been evicted from their homes by Zionist forces, their land confiscated, their villages and olive groves razed. As a consequence of this ongoing displacement, Palestinians comprise the largest refugee population in the world (over five million), the majority living within 100 kilometers of their natal homes, villages, and farmlands. In defiance of United Nations Resolution 194, Israel has an active policy of opposing the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their ancestral homes and lands on the grounds that they are not entitled to exercise the Israeli Law of Return, which is reserved for Jews.

In Sheikh Jarrah, a neighborhood in eastern occupied Jerusalem, we met an 88-year-old woman who was forcibly evicted in the middle of the night; she watched as the Israeli military moved settlers into her house a mere two hours later. Now living in the small back rooms of what was once her large family residence, she defiantly asserted that neither Israel's courts nor its military could ever force her from her home. In the city of Hebron, we were stunned by the conspicuous



presence of Israeli soldiers, who maintain veritable conditions of apartheid for the city's Palestinian population of almost 200,000, as against its 700 Jewish settlers. We crossed several Israeli checkpoints designed to control Palestinian movement on West Bank roads and along the Green Line. Throughout our stay, we met Palestinians who, because of Israel's annexation of Jerusalem and plans to remove its native population, have been denied entry to the Holy City. We spoke to a man who lives ten minutes away from Jerusalem but who has not been able to enter the city for twenty-seven years. The Israeli government thus continues to wage a demographic war for Jewish dominance over the Palestinian population.

We were never able to escape the jarring sight of the ubiquitous apartheid wall, which stands in contempt of international law and human rights principles. Constructed of twenty-five-foot-high concrete slabs, electrified cyclone fencing, and winding razor wire, it almost completely encloses the West Bank and extends well east of the Green Line marking Israel's pre-1967 borders. It snakes its way through ancient olive groves, destroying the beauty of the landscape, dividing communities and families, severing farmers from their fields and depriving them of their livelihood. In Abu Dis, the wall cuts across the campus of Al Quds University through the soccer field. In Qalqiliya, we saw massive gates built to control the entry and access of Palestinians to their lands and homes, including a gated corridor through which Palestinians with increasingly rare Israeli-issued permits are processed as they enter Israel for work, sustaining the very state that has displaced them. Palestinian children are forced through similar corridors, lining-up for hours twice each day to attend school. As one Palestinian colleague put it, "Occupied Palestine is the largest prison in the world."

An extensive prison system bolsters the occupation and suppresses resistance. Everywhere we went we met people who had either been imprisoned themselves or had relatives who had been incarcerated. Twenty thousand Palestinians are locked inside Israeli prisons, at least 8,000 of them are political prisoners and more than 300 are children. In Jerusalem, we met with members of the Palestinian Legislative Council who are being protected from arrest by the International Committee of the Red Cross. In Um el-Fahem, we met with an Islamist leader just after his release from prison and heard a riveting account of his experience on the Mavi Marmara and the 2010 Gaza Flotilla. The criminalization of their political activity, and that of the many Palestinians we met, was a constant and harrowing theme.

We also came to understand how overt repression is buttressed by deceptive representations of the state of Israel as the most developed social democracy in the region. As feminists, we deplore the Israeli practice of "pink-washing," the state's use of ostensible support for gender and sexual equality to dress-up its occupation. In Palestine, we consistently found evidence and analyses of a more substantive approach to an indivisible justice. We met the President and the leadership of the Arab Feminist Union and several other women's groups in Nablus who spoke about the role and struggles of Palestinian women on several fronts. We visited one of the oldest women's empowerment centers in Palestine, In'ash al-Usra, and learned about various income-generating cultural projects. We also spoke with Palestinian Queers for BDS [Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions], young organizers who frame the struggle for gender and sexual justice as part and parcel of a comprehensive framework for self-determination and liberation. Feminist colleagues at Birzeit University, An-Najah University, and Mada al-Carmel spoke to us about the organic

linkage of anti-colonial resistance with gender and sexual equality, as well as about the transformative role Palestinian institutions of higher education play in these struggles.

We were continually inspired by the deep and abiding spirit of resistance in the stories people told us, in the murals inside buildings such as Ibdaa Center in Dheisheh Refugee Camp, in slogans painted on the apartheid wall in Qalqiliya, Bethlehem, and Abu Dis, in the education of young children, and in the commitment to emancipatory knowledge production. At our meeting with the Boycott National Committee—an umbrella alliance of over 200 Palestinian civil society organizations, including the General Union of Palestinian Women, the General Union of Palestinian Workers, the Palestinian Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel [PACBI], and the Palestinian Network of NGOs—we were humbled by their appeal: “We are not asking you for heroic action or to form freedom brigades. We are simply asking you not to be complicit in perpetuating the crimes of the Israeli state.”

Therefore, we unequivocally endorse the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Campaign. The purpose of this campaign is to pressure Israeli state-sponsored institutions to adhere to international law, basic human rights, and democratic principles as a condition for just and equitable social relations. We reject the argument that to criticize the State of Israel is anti-Semitic. We stand with Palestinians, an increasing number of Jews, and other human rights activists all over the world in condemning the flagrant injustices of the Israeli occupation.

We call upon all of our academic and activist colleagues in the U.S. and elsewhere to join us by endorsing the BDS campaign and by working to end U.S. financial support, at \$8.2 million daily, for the Israeli state and its occupation. We call upon all people of conscience to engage in serious dialogue about Palestine and to acknowledge connections between the Palestinian cause and other struggles for justice. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

Rabab Abdulhadi, San Francisco State University+  
 Ayoka Chenzira, artist and filmmaker, Atlanta, GA  
 Angela Y. Davis, University of California, Santa Cruz+  
 Gina Dent, University of California, Santa Cruz+  
 G. Melissa Garcia, Ph.D. Candidate, Yale University+  
 Anna Romina Guevarra, author and sociologist, Chicago, IL  
 Beverly Guy-Sheftall, author, Atlanta, GA  
 Premilla Nadasen, author, New York, NY  
 Barbara Ransby, author and historian, Chicago, IL  
 Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Syracuse University+  
 Waziyatawin, University of Victoria+

+For identification purposes only

## **D. An Open Letter to LGBTIQ Communities and Allies on the Israeli Occupation of Palestine**

Published by the Queer Delegation to Palestine on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2012

Available at: <http://www.queersolidaritywithpalestine.com/>

We are a diverse group of lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer and trans activists, academics, artists, and cultural workers from the United States who participated in a solidarity tour in the West Bank of Palestine and Israel from January 7-13, 2012.

What we witnessed was devastating and created a sense of urgency around doing our part to end this occupation and share our experience across a broad cross-section of the LGBTIQ community. We saw with our own eyes the walls—literally and metaphorically—separating villages, families and land. From this, we gained a profound appreciation for how deeply embedded and far reaching this occupation is through every aspect of Palestinian daily life.

So too, we gained new insights into how Israeli civil society is profoundly affected by the dehumanizing effects of Israeli state policy toward Palestinians in Israel and in the West Bank. We were moved by the immense struggle being waged by some Israelis in resistance to state policies that dehumanize and deny the human rights of Palestinians.

We ended our trip in solidarity with Palestinian and Israeli people struggling to end the occupation of Palestine, and working for Palestinian independence and self-sovereignty.

Among the things we saw were:

- the 760 km (470 mi) separation wall (jidar) partitioning and imprisoning the Palestinian people;
- how the wall's placement works to confiscate large swaths of Palestinian land, splits villages and families in two, impedes Palestinians from working their agricultural land, and in many cases does not advance the ostensible security interests of Israel;
- a segregated road system (one set of roads for cars with Israeli plates, and another much inferior one for cars with Palestinian plates) throughout the West Bank, constructed by the Israeli state and enforced by the Israeli army; these roads ease Israeli travel to and from illegal settlements in the West Bank and severely impede Palestinian travel between villages, to agricultural land, and throughout a territory which is and has been their homeland;
- a system of permits (identification cards) that limits the travel of Palestinian people and functionally imprisons them, separating them from family, health care, jobs and other necessities;
- militarized checkpoints with barbed wire and soldiers armed with automatic rifles and the humiliation and harassment the Palestinian people experience daily in order to travel from one place to another;
- the reconfiguration of maps to render invisible Palestinian villages/homelands;
- harmful living conditions created and enforced by Israeli law and policy such as limited access to water and electricity in many Palestinian homes;

- violence perpetrated by Israeli settlers against Palestinians, and the ongoing growth of illegal settlements facilitated by the Israeli military;
- homelessness as a result of the razing of Palestinian homes by the Israeli state;
- home invasions, tear gas attacks, “skunk water” attacks, and the arrest of Palestinian children by the Israeli military as part of ongoing harassment designed to force Palestinian villagers to give up their land;

While travel restrictions prevented us from directly witnessing the state of things in the Gaza Strip, we believe the blockade of the Gaza Strip has produced a humanitarian crisis of monumental proportion.

Our time together in Palestine has led us to understand that we have a responsibility to share with our US based LGBTIQ communities what we saw and heard so that we can do more together to end this occupation. In that spirit, we offer the following summary points in solidarity with the Palestinian people:

1. The liberation of the Palestinian people from the project of Israeli occupation is the foremost goal of the Palestinian people and we fully support this aim. We also understand that liberation from this form of colonization and apartheid goes hand in hand with the liberation of queer Palestinians from the project of global heterosexism.
2. We call out and reject the state of Israel’s practice of pinkwashing, that is, a well-funded, cynical publicity campaign marketing a purportedly gay-friendly Israel to an international audience so as to distract attention from the devastating human rights abuses it commits on a daily basis against the Palestinian people. Key to Israel’s pinkwashing campaign is the manipulative and false labeling of Israeli culture as gay-friendly and Palestinian culture as homophobic. It is our view that comparisons of this sort are both inaccurate – homophobia and transphobia are to be found throughout Palestinian and Israeli society – and that this is beside the point: Israel’s illegal occupation of Palestine cannot be somehow justified or excused by its purportedly tolerant treatment of some sectors of its own population. We stand in solidarity with Palestinian queer organizations like Al Qaws and Palestinian Queers for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (PQBDS) whose work continues to impact queer Palestinians and all Palestinians. (<http://www.alqaws.org>, <http://www.pqbds.com/>)
3. We urge LGBTIQ individuals and communities to resist replicating the practice of pinkwashing that insists on elevating the sexual freedom of Palestinian people over their economic, environmental, social, and psychological freedom. Like the Palestinian activists we met, we view heterosexism and sexism as colonial projects and, therefore, see both as interrelated and interconnected regimes that must end.
4. We stand in solidarity with queer Palestinian activists who are working to end the occupation, and also with Israeli activists, both queer and others, who are resisting the occupation that is being maintained and extended in their name.
5. We name the complicity of the United States in this human rights catastrophe and call on our government to end its participation in an unjust regime that places it and us on the wrong side of peace and justice.
6. We support efforts on the part of Palestinians to achieve full self-determination, such as building an international Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement which

calls for the fulfillment of three fundamental demands:

(<http://www.bdsmovement.net/call>)

- The end of the Occupation and the dismantling of the Wall (jidar).
  - The right of return for displaced Palestinians.
  - The recognition and restoration of the equal rights of citizenship for Israeli citizens of Palestinian descent.
7. We call upon all of our academic and activist colleagues in the US and elsewhere to join us by supporting all Palestinian efforts that center these three demands and by working to end US financial support, at \$8.2 million daily, for the Israeli state and its occupation.

Signed, January 25, 2012:

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*All organizational affiliations are listed for identification purposes only and in no way indicate a position taken by such organizations on the issues raised in this statement.*